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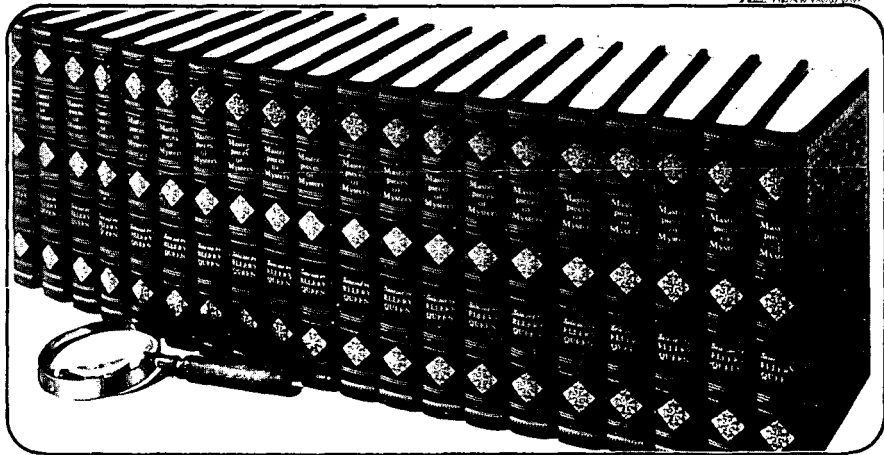
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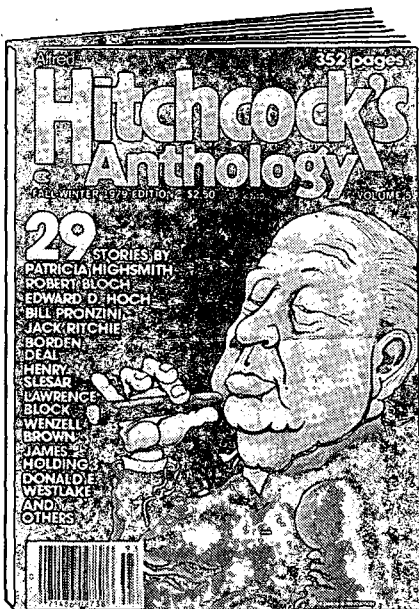
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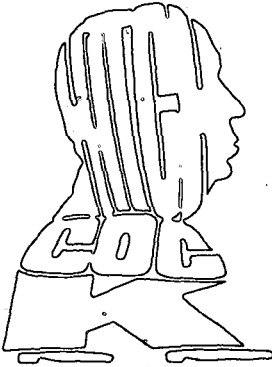
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August 1979



Dear Reader:

This issue is packed with exciting stories by some of your favorite authors, stories that are far from run-of-the-mill, with no also-rans.

John Lutz's "Where Is Harry Beal?" concerns a detective's efforts to run a missing person to earth. The police in a quiet English village run in a killer in "False Alarm" by Anne Morice. A very bad run of luck changes for the hero in Miel Tanburn's "Getting Even." There's a plot to run over a runaway husband with a van in "Dream Fragments" by Robert Twohy, and folk dancers run riot in "A Matter of Kicks" by Lawrence Treat and Richard Plotz. Finally, the acting troupe in William Bankier's "Is There a Killer in the House?" runs through some scenes from the melodrama *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, with unexpected results.

And when you run out of stories to read, don't forget to turn to our new movie and TV column, *Crime on Screen*. Before you run off to get your exercise, that is.

Good running.

Alfred Hitchcock

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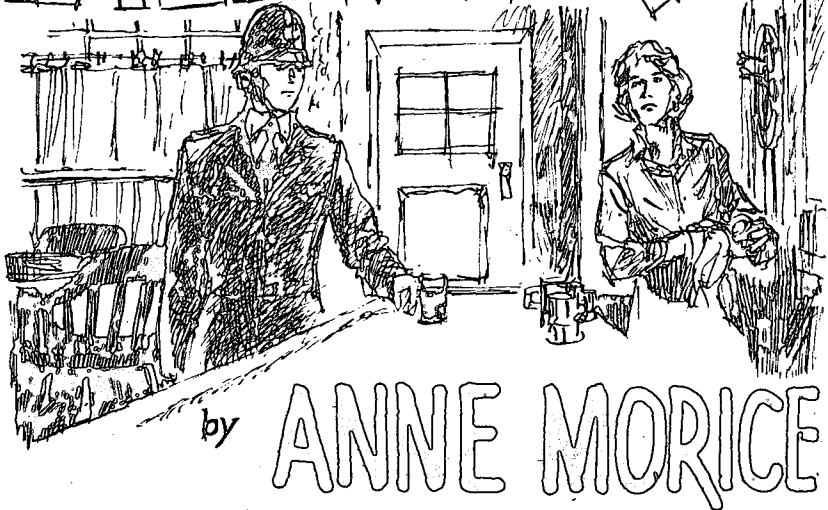
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It wasn't the first time the Lodge had been burglarized . . .

FALSE ALARM



by

ANNE MORICE

At 7:23 P.M. on Wednesday, June 8, a warm and cloudless evening, the Swains Lodge burglar alarm rang in the Maresfield police station eight miles away. A call was put out to the patrol cars and was answered by Police Constables Fiske and Gillespie, then four miles northwest of Swains village, who were instructed to proceed to the Lodge. They turned into the driveway exactly thirteen minutes later, which broke all previous records. They were nevertheless at least ten minutes too late. . .

FALSE ALARM

5

The Lodge was separated from its nearest neighbors by a large flower garden and paddock on one side and several acres of woodland on the other, but a number of private citizens still heard the alarm.

Air Marshal Stevenson and his wife, Pamela, were sitting on their terrace, sipping pre-dinner sherries and not finding much to say to each other. This was a new and disagreeable experience for them both. Their marriage, which had endured for thirty-five years, had been exceptionally harmonious and occasions of this kind were normally animated by the cozy exchange of news and gossip.

However, a month had gone by since Dick Stevenson's retirement from the Air Ministry—a month in which they had been required to spend more time in each other's company than they really liked. To Pamela's increasing dismay, instead of using his new-found leisure to improve his golf game, chop and store firewood for the winter, or take the dogs for long walks in the Harmans' woods, Dick was beset by a craving for constant reassurance that he was still the human being about whom her life revolved, and not a cast-off, expendable has-been.

Unhappier still, his sense of disorientation and insecurity had led him to take on a number of unnecessary household chores for which he was totally unfit. Only that morning Pamela had exhausted herself finding tactful ways to fend off his proposal to rearrange the entire kitchen to make it more efficient for her.

And so the burglar alarm, piercing faintly through the peaceful evening, came as a welcome diversion.

"Not the Lodge again surely?" Pamela asked, looking quite animated.

"It sounds distinctly like it, I must say," Dick admitted. "Allowing for wind direction and one thing and another, I'd be inclined to say that's where it's coming from."

"Wind direction, my foot!" Pamela said, forgetting herself. "You know as well as I do that the Harmans are the only people around here with a contraption like that."

"It doesn't seem to do them much good though."

"Apart from advertising to all and sundry that they've got plenty worth stealing," Pamela said. "Maisie Harman thinks it's a crazy idea, but she told me the insurance company insisted on their installing this very sophisticated alarm system after their second burglary. This one makes how many? Four?"

"Must be three or four," Dick agreed.

"Including the time their London place was burgled while they were down here. They'd no sooner gone back to tidy things up there than the Lodge was broken into."

"Yes—some people seem to have all the bad luck, don't they? Bad show too, in this case, seeing what a goodhearted, generous couple they are. Do you think I should wander down and see what's going on?"

"No, Dick, I do not! The alarm rings in the police station. It's their job to cope with it."

"Yes, but remember how long it took them to get up here last time? I might at least prevent those swine getting away scot free. I could probably manage to block the drive with our car."

"And get the car smashed up for your pains? Have you forgotten how they knocked the gate down that time, in their stampede to get away, when some well-meaning person tried to shut them in? Besides, they'll have grabbed whatever they came for and be miles away by the time you could get there," Pamela added, with the inconsistency which, lately, Dick was beginning to find profoundly irritating.

The alarm was also heard a hundred yards up the lane in the saloon bar of The White Hart, this Wednesday evening being, as so often, a quiet one. Two old men were playing a slow game of dominoes, a youth and his girl friend nursed their crash helmets and sipped shandy in stony silence on a bench near the door, and Peter Logan was standing at the bar chatting to Molly Taglett, the landlord's wife.

He had arrived about five minutes earlier and had been greeted by a shout from Molly. "Evening, Pete! Message for you. Your wife's been on the blower."

"Oh, really? When was that?"

"Oh, 'bout ten minutes ago—no more. She said to tell you one's your limit tonight. You're needed at home—seems you've got company. Nice thing, isn't it, for me to tell the customers to push off the minute they stick their noses round the door?"

"Better make it a short one then, Molly. Scotch on the rocks, if you'd be so good."

"Coming up! And she wants you to take a bottle of the claret with you," Molly said, holding a glass against the mouth of a bottle she held upside down above her head. "I've just been to fetch one up from the cellar. It's over on the side there. How's that for service?"

"Terrific as usual. What's up, then?" Logan asked. "Jack taking the evening off?"

"Not exactly. He had to go to the dentist, poor old Jack."

"Bit late for that, isn't it?" Peter asked, leaning on the counter.

"Didn't have any choice, did he? Woke up during the night, see, screaming in agony. He thought it must be an abscess or something, but the dentist didn't have a single appointment to give him right through the day. He told Jack as it was an emergency he'd see him after surgery hours, at half-past six, it was the best he could do. And won't Jack be in a fine old state when he gets home? Expecting me to trot up and down with hot milk and brandy half the night, I shouldn't wonder. No peace for the wicked, eh? Still, it could be worse—it's always pretty dead in here Wednesday evenings."

It was then that they both heard the faint, far-off, unmistakable whine of the burglar alarm. The pair on the bench remained as impassive as ever and, although one of the domino players briefly raised his head and sucked hard on his pipe, this could have indicated that he was merely working out his next diabolical move.

"Oh, not again!" Molly said.

"Not what again?"

"Another break-in at the Lodge. You must have heard about them. It must be the third time they've copped it in a year. Wait a bit though. That's funny!"

"Funny for whom?"

"I didn't mean like that. I was thinking it doesn't happen as a rule when they're staying down here. The thieves generally wait till they're back in London, to give themselves a clear field."

"And what makes you think they haven't gone back to London? Don't they only use the place for weekends?"

"Well, no, not always. Sometimes they stay down during the week this time of year, when we've got the fete and the cricket matches and all the rest of it. The funny thing is that I happened to notice a car by their front door when I went by this morning. The gate was wide open too."

"Probably just a delivery van or something."

"Could be. It looked like a private car though. Oh, well, damn all we can do about it," said Molly.

"I don't know," Peter said, finishing off his drink and reaching over to pick up the bottle of claret. "It's a bit out of my way, but I suppose it

wouldn't do any harm to go round by the Lodge and take a look. I mean, if by some chance these chaps have miscalculated and Mrs. Harman should be there on her own, things could be a bit dodgy."

"I wouldn't if I was you. You can bet they checked the place was empty before they went in and you could be in real trouble if there happened to be three or four of them on the job. Besides, it rings down at the station and the police will be on their way by now. I daresay they wouldn't thank you for interfering."

"That's true—and I admit I'm not really cut out for heroics. Apart from which, I'll probably be in for all the trouble I can cope with if I don't push off home pretty soon. Goodnight, Molly. Give Jack my commiserations and don't go stinting him on the hot milk and brandy."

"No—and you drive carefully, mind. We don't want this place getting a bad name and there'll be coppers about this evening."

"Too right," he agreed, pausing by the door. "'Night, then. Be seeing you."

The White Hart was set a few yards back from the lane and had a gravel front yard large enough to accommodate half a dozen cars. Peter Logan's was the only car there and there was a motorcycle parked in the center of the remaining space. As he came out of the pub he heard the growl of a motor engine approaching in low gear. Two seconds later a black Cortina came swinging sharply toward him, causing him to jump to one side. The driver noticed the bike just in time but, in swerving to avoid it, slightly grazed the rear offside of his car against the telephone kiosk at the corner of the lane.

"Jack seems to be in a bit of a hurry," Peter remarked, climbing into his own car, where his passenger was already waiting. "And how are you, by the way? Everything O.K.?"

"Everything's just fine."

"Well done! I got the plonk, incidentally," he added, switching on the ignition, and they both laughed.

At 7:45 P.C. Fiske telephoned the station from Swains Lodge to report and to ask for instructions and assistance. Three police cars set out from Maresfield approximately ten minutes later. These contained Inspector Watson, accompanied by a sergeant, closely followed by a team of photographers and fingerprint experts and a second sergeant and the police surgeon bringing up the rear. P.C. Fiske, having now positioned himself

FALSE ALARM

by the front door of the Lodge, saluted as the Inspector stepped out. "This way, sir," he said.

"Just a minute, Fiske. Before we get started, how did they get in?"

"Downstairs cloakroom, sir, round the back. Leaded window and just the one pane broken—enough to get a hand in and release the catch. It was the only one in the whole house that wasn't double glazed so far as we've been able to ascertain."

"And Mrs. Harman?"

"In the lounge, sir."

"Right. Be with you in a moment."

The Inspector walked over to the second car, which had just drawn up, put his head in the window, issued some instructions to the occupants, and then returned to the front door.

"All right, Fiske. Lead the way."

There seemed to be very little out of place in the room Fiske had described as the lounge, but which its owners called the drawing room. Some books had been removed from a glass-fronted cabinet and thrown on the floor, two or three bureau drawers were opened and their contents disturbed, and a Dufy painting of sailing boats and parasols on an expanse of green water was on the floor, exposing a small built-in safe it had concealed on the wall but to the naked eye, at least, no attempt had been made to open the safe.

The Inspector's principal concern was with Mrs. Harman, who was lying face down on a Persian rug beside the fireplace. The back of her skull had been smashed in. After a cursory examination, Dr. Elliott, the police surgeon, gave it as his opinion that she had been struck from behind with a blunt instrument, and that death had occurred within the previous thirty to fifty minutes. P.C. Fiske was privately of the opinion that this was one verdict that could have been arrived at without benefit of an expensive medical training.

By twenty minutes to ten the ambulance and technicians had departed and Inspector Watson had performed the disagreeable task of locating Mr. Harman at his London club and breaking the news to him. He delegated P.C. Gillespie to remain on duty at the Lodge until relieved, then turned to Fiske and issued a more complicated set of instructions.

In pursuance of these, as he himself was later to put it, Constable Fiske drew up outside The White Hart five minutes before closing time.

The public bar was dark and empty and there was no one left in the saloon except Molly, who was listening to a Big Band program on the radio as she sloshed dirty glasses through a trough of water beneath the counter.

"What's this, then?" she asked, switching off the radio as he entered. "Jumping the gun a bit, aren't we? Still five minutes to go, I'd like you to know."

"In that case," Fiske replied, seating himself at the bar, "what's it to be?"

"Oh, well, that's very nice of you. Thanks. I'll have a bitter lemon, if you don't mind. I don't want to be unsociable, but I've got a long night ahead by the look of things. What can I get you?" she asked.

"I'll have the same, please. Seeing as I'm on duty."

"You are? Oh, of course, I get it now. You mean the Harmans? There really has been another break-in at the Lodge?"

"That's right," said P.C. Fiske. "Didn't you hear the alarm?"

"Oh, sure—but those things go off by mistake as often as not, don't they? Somebody forgets they're switched on and opens a window or something."

"Not this time."

"That right? They take much?"

"I can't say for sure till the owner gets here. It doesn't look like it though."

"So why all the panic?"

"No panic, Mrs. Taglett. Just a few routine inquiries, if you'll be so good."

"I know. Like whether we've had any strangers in lately—men with stockings over their heads, that kind of thing."

"And have you?"

"Sorry to disappoint you, but the answer's no. We get our usual share of ships that pass in the night. Had a couple in this evening, as it happens, but nothing in your line."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I just know, that's all. It was a young fellow and his girl. Come on a motor bike. Never seen them before and shan't worry if I never do again. They were here about forty minutes and a couple of shandys was the sum total. Besides, they were sitting over there good as gold when the alarm went off, so that's no interest to you, is it?"

"Who else was in tonight?"

"Well, let's see now. Apart from the three or four regulars in the public, who come at five-thirty and bang on the door if we're two minutes late opening, and Brothers Charlie and Bert with their domino set, as per, I don't think there's been a bleeding soul. No, hang on a bit, I'm a liar! Pete Logan dropped in for a few minutes. But he's a regular too, in a manner of speaking. Often stops off here on his way home of an evening."

"Logan? I can't call that name to mind. Is he a local too?"

"He is now—him and his wife. They're a nice young couple and real country types, for all he works in London. Very busy with the gardens committee, secretary of the village cricket club, you name it. They moved into Campion Cottage when old Goodchild went to live with his daughter. Know who I mean?"

"Roughly. How long ago was that? Eighteen months? Two years?"

"Yes. Doesn't time fly? But they're all right, the Logans are. When we heard that alarm go off Pete would have been all set to go down to the Lodge and investigate if I hadn't stopped him. He was afraid it could have been rough on Mrs. Harman if she happened to be there on her own."

"So why did you stop him?" Fiske asked.

"Are you joking? I pointed out that these chaps can turn nasty—but they're usually pretty well behaved so long as no one tries to get in their way. Or so I've heard."

"That's not always true, unfortunately."

"No? Somebody got hurt, then? Oh, I know, I know—you're here to ask questions, not answer them. But Pete was in here propping up the bar when the alarm sounded, so that's a washout too, isn't it? I'm sorry I can't be more help."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. We can't afford to overlook anything. You say he was on his way home from London—so he must have gone past the Lodge before he got here. There's just a chance he'd have noticed something out of the way. Anyway, I'd better clear it, I suppose, before I report back. You don't happen to know the Logans' telephone number? It might be more tactful to give them a ring before I go barging in."

"Not offhand, but not to worry. They've got company tonight, so they'll still be up. Anyway, you can't ring them, come to think of it. Their number's out of order."

"Oh, is it? How do you know that?" he asked.

She set her glass down on the counter with a thump and stared at him, her mouth open. "Since you mention it, I don't know, do I? And it's not true anyway. She rang me up only this evening to ask me to tell him to take a bottle of wine home. Now there's a funny thing! I must be dreaming or going bonkers or something. All the excitement, I suppose."

"I expect so."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you their number, but they'll be in the book by now. The phone's out in the passage. The brewers don't allow us to let customers use it—they have to make do with the public one outside—but I expect there'd be an exception for you, seeing as it's official business."

"I don't think I'll bother," said Fiske, "since you think they'll still be up. I'll just get along there right away. What about the other lot," he added, collecting his hat and gloves from a barstool, "the people just up the road? Any chance of finding them at home, watching the ten o'clock news?"

"No good asking me, we're not on those terms. Air Marshal Toffee Nose looks in occasionally on a Sunday morning to patronize the peasantry or when he's run out of cigarettes, but we never see her, so your guess is as good as mine."

"I'll have to chance it, then. Good night, Mrs. Taglett, and thanks for all your help."

When he had gone, Molly swilled out their two glasses in the trough, left them upside down to drain, and went over to lock and bolt the door. After a final look around, she switched off the lights and went upstairs to relate the whole saga to Jack, who was not in a receptive mood.

"Something fishy about it, if you ask me," she announced at the end of her recital.

"What way, fishy?" Jack inquired, drawing the sheet and blankets up to his neck as though to protect himself.

"Oh, you know—'just routine,' he says, in that cheesy voice they put on—but you know as well as I do, Jack, this isn't the first time the Harmans have had this trouble, poor things, and when have we ever had the coppers round before, just answer me that?"

But Jack either could not or would not. He rolled his head sideways, placed the hot-water bottle against his jaw, and closed his eyes. Molly sighed, picked up the empty tumbler, and plodded downstairs to make him another hot drink. . .

It was not part of his assignment, but training and sheer force of habit caused Fiske to make a brief inspection of the yard before leaving. There were several tire marks in the gravel, some of which he identified as belonging to a motorcycle, which had evidently tipped over at one point. The driver's door of the black Cortina was locked, as was the one behind it, and there were some unidentifiable, lumpy objects on the back seat, covered by a piece of sacking. It was while running his torch over the two nearside doors, which were also locked, that he noticed some traces of red paint on the otherwise clean bodywork. From them, he glanced automatically at the telephone kiosk a few yards away. It had a new-looking scratch on it at about the right level, and he found himself staring at it in an abstracted fashion for almost a minute. However, it was scratched and dented in a good many other places as well and badly in need of a coat of paint, and he recognized that, even in conjunction with some other information that had come his way during the past ten minutes, he was still a long way from proving anything.

There being nothing more to delay him at The White Hart, he climbed into his car, still deep in thought, and proceeded to his next two ports of call. However, his luck ran out, for there were no lights showing in the Stevensons' house and, as he discovered a few minutes later, the occupants of Campion Cottage had also apparently retired.

All right for some, he thought, then opened his notebook and jotted down some of the facts he had gleaned before driving back to the station to incorporate them into his report.

Three weeks later Fiske tapped on the door of the chief superintendent's office and was told to enter.

The chief was going through a stack of folders on his desk. After glancing up briefly, he turned over a page with one hand and with the other gestured to Fiske to be seated.

"Be with you in a minute, Fiske," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

Two or three minutes went by before the chief superintendent closed the file.

"I've just been going through Inspector Watson's report on the Harman case. There are some interesting features."

"Yes, sir."

"And you appear to have distinguished yourself, Constable," the Su-

perintendent said, thinking to himself, I'm beginning to sound like a bloody schoolmaster.

"Thank you very much, sir," Fiske replied, sounding modest and eager, like a bloody head prefect.

"Yes, and Inspector Watson has given you quite a writeup. I'm not inclined to think it will cause any serious delay in your promotion either."

"Thank you, sir," Fiske said again after a slight hesitation.

"Well, Fiske, you understand, of course, that this is off the record and principally, I should add, to satisfy my own curiosity, but this report naturally confines itself to bare facts—I'd be interested to learn what first put you on to this pair of beauties?"

"It was really Mrs. Taglett who gave the game away, sir. She's rather a chatty sort of person," said Fiske.

"That was lucky for you."

"Yes, sir. Very lucky indeed."

"Still, all credit to you for taking advantage of the fact. Precisely which beans did this garrulous lady spill into your lap?"

"There were really three things," the Constable said. "The first was her telling me how the Logans had dug themselves in up here, even though they were newcomers, in a sense. Like him being secretary of the cricket club and all that sort of thing."

"That doesn't sound particularly heinous."

"No, sir, perhaps not—but then, you see, I already knew—that is, everyone knew—that Mr. and Mrs. Harman were dead keen on these village affairs and were always coughing up contributions for one thing or another, so it gave me a possible connection between them and Logan."

"Tenuous, but worth pursuing, as you've proved. What was the second thing?"

"That also was a bit—what was that word, sir?"

"Tenuous?"

"That's right. It was Mrs. Taglett telling me that after the alarm had gone off Logan was all for going down to investigate, only she put him off the idea. But it's the reason he gave that was interesting. He said it would be rough on Mrs. Harman if she were up at the house on her own, and that struck me as funny. What I mean is—we happened to know that she actually had been there on her own and he might have known it too, if he hadn't been in London all day, or if he'd been home first and seen

his wife. But Mrs. Harman didn't normally come down without her husband, and I wondered why he thought she might have done this time. It made me wonder whether it could possibly be that she'd had an appointment with Logan—something about the cricket club, for instance. Quite a jump in the dark, you might say, but what really made me feel it was worth following up was the bit about the telephone."

"The telephone?"

"Mrs. Taglett mentioned that the Logans' phone was out of order, but when I asked her how she knew she couldn't tell me. She'd just spoken without thinking. But a few minutes afterwards I saw that kiosk they've got there on the corner and it struck me the reason Mrs. Taglett might have said what she did was because Mrs. Logan had rung her up about the wine from a public call box. Mrs. Taglett was singlehanded that evening and probably not paying much attention, so it hadn't properly sunk in."

"Yes, I see. Go on, Fiske."

"None of it meant very much on its own, sir, but when I got up to the Logans' house there wasn't a light on anywhere, so either they were out or they were having an early night. Whichever it was, they had been lying about having company."

"Well, how I worked that out was like this, sir. If it had been a bottle of gin or Scotch, say, that Mr. Logan was to take home with him, that might have been because they were expecting company in the early part of the evening—but wine usually means dinner, doesn't it? Anyway, with people like them it does, and I couldn't somehow swallow the idea that they'd had friends in to dinner, seen them off, done a bit of tidying up, and gone to bed with the lights switched off, all by half past ten."

"Yes, one might be forgiven for finding that unusual, and so I suppose at that point you suspected that the telephone call about the wine must have been bogus. Mrs. Logan hadn't needed it at all—it was simply a prearranged code they'd fixed up between them."

"Something like that did occur to me, yes, sir," Fiske admitted, looking so crestfallen at this usurpation of his role that the superintendent felt constrained to toss the ball gently back into his court.

"Well, don't keep me in suspense!" he said. "Where did you go from there?"

"Well, sir, after I'd put it all together as you might say, I decided to try a bit of reconstruction. Supposing Logan calls at the Lodge on his

way home? Mrs. Harman is expecting him and lets him in herself, but he has a pretty good idea what she wants to talk to him about and he's already made up his mind to kill her."

"Not a bad guess. He'd been forging checks, hers among them. She was always doling out checks for a new cricket pavilion and so forth—so he'd had plenty of opportunity to study her handwriting. It looks like Mrs. Harman had begun to suspect him but, being a decent soul, she wouldn't tell her husband about it until Logan had had a chance to clear himself. How about his car though? He could hardly have risked being seen driving away in it?"

"He parked it off the road, a bit higher up on the edge of the wood, more likely. Plenty of picnickers and so on do that on such a fine evening, so it wouldn't have been remarked on."

"Yes, that'll do, I should think. And then?"

"Then he makes some excuse to get Mrs. Harman to turn her back on him and he clubs her. When he's sure she's dead he turns the room over a bit to make it look like the thieves had lost their nerve and scarpered. Then he goes out by the back door, heaves a brick through the cloakroom window, comes back in again, leaving the door open for himself, and switches on the burglar alarm. Then all he has to do is walk out again and shut the back door behind him. The whole thing needn't have taken more than four or five minutes. It was the next part that was more dodgy.

"He'd have been able to tell, almost to the minute, what time he'd get to The White Hart, but it wouldn't have been all that straightforward for his wife. Someone could have dropped in, or rung up and gone on talking just when it was time for her to leave. That would have been awkward. He had to be in the pub when the alarm goes, so he'd want to know how long he'd got to wait for it, what to order and how fast to drink it, and that. So that would be why they rigged up their signal. The telephone call about the wine was to let him know her position and that she was all set to go into action."

"Well done, Fiske—I'm impressed! And what part of the action had you reserved for Mrs. Logan?"

"Once I'd got that far, sir, it began to seem obvious. All she had to do was cut through that corner of the wood, approach the house from the back, stick her hand through the broken window pane to release the catch, and set off the alarm. She didn't even need to go inside—just nip back the same way she'd come."

"I congratulate you, though I'm not certain you're right in every particular. That business of tumbling the room about, for instance, may not have been just artistic trimmings—we think it more likely that he was looking for a forged check or some evidence of that kind—but you weren't far off the mark. What you couldn't have known, because none of us did till later, was that Logan had already spent two years inside on a fraud and forgery charge. He changed his name when he came out, moved to a new locality, and set about becoming a pillar of village society."

"But the old habits proved too strong," Fiske said.

"That's the truth of it, I daresay. Well, thank you, Fiske. This has been illuminating and I shouldn't entirely blame you if you were feeling a trifle pleased with yourself."

"Oh, no, not all that much, sir," Fiske replied, displaying a return of the boyish modesty as he stood up to leave. "It was Mrs. Taglett who did most of the work. Besides, like you've always said yourself, sir, it's what seems like the unimportant details that really count—and once you've got enough of them you can't easily go wrong."

The Superintendent, not noted for his sense of humor, watched him go with a gleam of wry amusement. He couldn't recall having uttered such words, but he no longer had any doubt at all that P.C. Fiske was destined for early promotion.

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The theft caused a big stir in the local social set . . .

THE VAN METRE DIAMOND

by
HERSCHEL
COZINE



When I opened the door to find myself staring down the business end of a .38, my keen instincts told me this wasn't any ordinary caller. My hunch was confirmed when the man behind the gun shoved me rudely into the room and slammed the door. "That thing doesn't shoot water, does it?" I remarked, trying to make light of the situation.

The man had no sense of humor. "Shut up," he said, brandishing the gun with a menacing wave.

THE VAN METRE DIAMOND

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"If you're here about the light bill, I'll write you a check right now," I said.

Another menacing wave of the gun convinced me that I was not dealing from strength. I shrugged and stepped back.

I don't mean to give the impression that I'm a brave man or a foolhardy one. It's just that I have a hard time accepting violence in any form. If I didn't kid around I'd keel over in a dead faint. At the moment my heart was beating furiously. I didn't dare think about it or it would probably stop in mid-beat, and there's no future in that.

The man with the gun was not exactly a work of art, unless you like Picasso. Only one eye worked. The other was veiled under a half-closed eyelid. He had thick lips and no neck. His nose tilted to the left and emitted a whistle every time he took a breath.

But the ring on his finger was another story. It contained a rock that would make Liz Taylor swoon. I know diamonds; that's my business.

"You're Blake Gardner?" No-neck asked in a nasal twang.

I nodded.

"Get your coat."

"Wait a minute," I said. "I was just getting ready to watch *Charlie's Angels*."

No-neck's face turned a deep purple. "Listen, wise guy," he growled, "the boss doesn't like to be kept waiting." He emphasized his last remark with a noticeable twitch of his trigger finger.

"O.K.," I said. "It's a rerun anyway." I pulled on my coat, all the while keeping a careful eye on the hardware in No-neck's hand. "Would you mind putting that away?" I asked him. "I'm allergic to guns. They make me break out in a cold sweat."

"Funny," he said. "Let's go."

He pushed me toward the door, opened it, and followed me down the hall to the street.

A black Chevy was parked in the loading zone just outside the apartment building. A man was slouched behind the wheel, a toothpick working furiously in his mouth. Why do tough guys chew on toothpicks, I wondered. When I was a kid it used to be bent cigarettes.

Before I had a chance to get a look at the driver I was shoved into the back seat. A pair of hands threw a blindfold over my eyes and a second later I felt the knot cut into the back of my head. Then my hands were tied, none too gently, with a hard rope that cut off the circulation.

The car pulled away from the curb. I decided to keep track of its route by listening for familiar sounds. Many a TV crime has been solved by alert victims who pay attention to details like that.

The only familiar sounds I heard were traffic noises. The car made six right turns, three left turns, and two U-turns. After that I stopped counting.

I wanted to ask the obvious questions. "Where am I going? Who wants to see me? What have I done to deserve this?" But I didn't bother. I knew in advance it was useless.

Instead I occupied my mind by thinking about the new tenant who had moved in across the hall from my apartment. She was poetry in motion, and her perfume was heavenly—fifty-dollar-an-ounce stuff. I had been trying all week to work up enough nerve to knock on her door. In spite of her looks she had no men friends that I knew of. What a waste!

Suddenly the car made a sharp left turn, accelerated briefly, and came to an abrupt stop. A moment later the back door opened and I was ushered rudely out of the car and up a flight of stairs. We thumped down a corridor of some kind—I counted twenty steps—then stopped. I heard the scraping of metal as a key turned in a lock.

There was something familiar about the place—a sound, smell, or presence I couldn't pinpoint. As I was trying to put my finger on it, I was shoved into a room and heard the door close behind me.

I was led through two more rooms, each time hearing the doors opening and closing. Then hands reached down and untied my wrists and pushed me into a chair.

"You can take the blindfold off," a voice said.

I rubbed some feeling back into my wrists, then pulled the blindfold off my eyes. The bright light was blinding and I squinted across a table at a blur that slowly developed into a man. He was about fifty, with a fringe of grey hair that just missed being gone altogether. His face resembled a passport photo. He smiled at me coldly, revealing a flash of gold. I smiled back with just as much warmth. "What the hell do you want with me?" I asked.

No-neck stirred behind me and I tensed, but the man at the table held up his hand.

"Relax, Adam," he said in a voice edged with a slight German accent. Then to me he added, "You are Blake Gardner?"

"Yeah. Who are you?"

"Never mind," he said.

I glanced quickly around the room. It was a small room with no furniture except the table and two chairs. There were no pictures on the walls, and the single window was covered with a heavy curtain that looked like it might once have done duty as a horse blanket. Yet I had the nagging feeling I had been here before.

"You are a diamond cutter?" It was more a statement than a question and before I could reply he answered it himself. "Your reputation is well known. You're the best in the business."

"Shucks, I bet you tell that to all the fellas."

His phony smile faded and a hard glint made his eyes shine. "Cut out the jokes. Cooperate and you won't get hurt."

"I'll cooperate," I said. "But so far I have no idea what I'm doing here."

His smile replaced the glint once more. He slid open the drawer of the table, removed a grey-metal box, and set it in front of me. "Open it," he said.

I lifted the lid. A black bag lay inside, tied with a drawstring. My hands shook a little as I untied the knot and turned the bag over.

The diamond necklace inside the bag took my breath away. I recognized it immediately.

"The Van Metre Diamond!" I said. "So you're the guys who—"

He nodded.

The theft of the Van Metre Diamond three days ago had caused a big stir in the local social set. It was one of the most beautiful and expensive necklaces in the country, if not in the whole world.

I picked up the necklace carefully, as if it would break if I moved too fast. I was so entranced by the beauty of it I forgot where I was. I pulled an eye loupe from my pocket and studied the large diamond. One hundred and fifty carats of perfection. More than a hundred smaller diamonds formed a triangle above the larger one.

"My diamond expert has left me," Baldy said as I set the necklace on the table. "He tried to outrun a bullet." He clucked sadly, and I wondered if perhaps the bullet had come from No-neck's toy. "I need the advice and help of someone like yourself."

"What kind of help?" I asked.

"I want you to cut the diamond."

I sat up straight. "You *what*?"

He silenced me with a wave of his stubby hand. "The Van Metre

Diamond is too well known to dispose of by ordinary means. I'd have to sell it for ten cents on the dollar." He lit a cigarette and blew the smoke my way. "Cut into smaller diamonds, it would be worth over a million."

"It would be worth nothing," I said.

It was Baldy's turn to sit up straight. "What are you talking about?"

"This is a fake. A good one, but a fake."

"It can't be," he said. "You're lying."

I looked shocked. "You doubt my word? Me? An expert?"

Baldy didn't answer. He eyed the necklace, then sat back and glared at me as if I had just told him there was no Santa Claus.

I turned the necklace over in my hand and examined it again. "This was made by Henri," I said. "Insurance requirements, you know. The original has never been worn."

"How do you know so much about the Van Metre Diamond?"

"We diamond cutters live in a small world. There are no secrets. Henri and I are good friends. As for the insurance regulations, that's common knowledge."

Baldy grabbed the necklace and the loupe out of my hands. He studied the big diamond carefully, turning it over and twisting it to catch the light. "I'm not an expert," he said at last, "but I know something about diamonds. These look real to me."

"Yeah," I said. "They're supposed to. Henri is an excellent craftsman. He's no nickel-and-dime man. This necklace is worth a lot of money, even if it is a fake."

Baldy raised an eyebrow. "How much?"

"A hundred thousand, maybe more. If you can find a buyer."

He threw the necklace down angrily. "Peanuts!" he growled. "The real necklace is worth at least five million."

I shrugged. "What's a few million?"

No-neck cuffed me on the back of the head. "Shut up, wise guy."

Baldy glowered at the man. "Cut the rough stuff." His face was beet-red and his mouth turned down at the corners in a pout. "I'm still not convinced this is a fake."

"O.K.," I said. "I can prove it if you want. I'll break it for you."

He sat back and puffed on his cigarette, his stony eyes boring into mine. "If this is a fake, why was it locked up in a vault that's as tough to crack as Fort Knox?"

"How should I know?" I asked. "Why do people put Cracker-Jack

trinkets in safety-deposit boxes? Maybe Mrs. Van Metre didn't want to buy another copy. A hundred grand isn't exactly pocket change. Besides, it would take time to get a replacement."

He grunted. "Where's the real one, then?"

"Did you look under the mattress?" I asked. No-neck stirred again and I readied myself for a set of knuckles, but nothing happened and I relaxed. "I'm a diamond cutter, not a detective."

Baldy suddenly became violent. He reached over, put his meaty hand on my throat, and squeezed. "Listen, Mac, I'm going to get another opinion on this diamond. If it's real you're a dead man." He tightened his grip until I started to choke, then shoved me back in my chair and balled his hands into fists.

"I told you I could prove it. Let me break it. I'll even buy it from you for one hundred thousand."

"What do you want it for?" he growled.

"I don't. But I don't like the option you're giving me. This necklace would fool most people, even diamond experts. If I didn't know about the copy I probably would have thought it was real." I paused and watched as Baldy shifted in his chair. "So you get a guy in here who tells you it's the real thing. You'd bring me back, make me cut it, and then kill me when the rock shattered. No, thanks."

"Why would I let *you* cut it?"

"You already said I'm the best in the business. I have a hunch you wouldn't trust anyone else with a stone like this. One slip and it's a pile of worthless junk. Quite frankly, I'm glad it's a phony. I'd hate to be responsible for ruining a five-million-dollar diamond."

Baldy uttered an oath and pounded the table. "Get him out of here," he said to No-neck.

"What do I do with him, Boss?"

I didn't like the question and I wasn't sure I'd be crazy about the answer. But Baldy proved himself to be an O.K. sort of crook. "Take him home. And don't do anything stupid. I may need him again."

Without warning, the blindfold was placed over my eyes and I was tied up again. I heard a door open and seconds later I was being led through rooms to the main entrance. As I waited for No-neck to unlock the front door I smelled something familiar. That was when I realized where I was.

The return trip was short. The car came to an abrupt stop and my

wrists were untied. Before I had a chance to take the blindfold off, I heard the car door open and I was shoved out. I landed hard on a cold, damp surface that felt like bricks. The car's engine roared and I heard a squeal of tires as it sped away.

Taking off the blindfold, I found myself in an alley. I stood up painfully and limped to the street. I was two blocks from my apartment.

I took a quick inventory of my aching body. Except for a scraped knee, everything seemed to be in good working order. I dusted myself off, applied a little spit to my scuffed shoes, and walked painfully home.

As I put the key in the lock I glanced across the hall to my luscious neighbor's apartment. There was no sign of activity, but I hadn't expected any. I let myself into my living room, sat down heavily, and reached for the phone.

I dialed a number, then sat back and massaged my aching knee as I waited for someone to answer on the other end of the line.

"Police Headquarters."

"Robbery Detail," I said.

A moment passed, then a masculine voice crackled against my ear. "Robbery. Sergeant Henderson."

I lowered my voice, speaking confidentially. "You will find the Van Metre Diamond and its new owners at 139 Ocean Drive, Apartment 2G."

"Who is this?" the man asked with a sudden interest.

"I'd rather not say. But the information I gave you is correct. Better act fast. There are two entrances to the apartment. Make sure they're both covered." I hung up.

The police arrived at my apartment building within five minutes. I watched through a crack in the door as the two uniformed men strode purposefully down the hall and knocked on the door of Apartment 2G across the hall.

"Police. Open the door!" one of them said.

I heard a commotion inside, followed by the sound of voices at the rear of the building. A few minutes later, Baldy and No-neck appeared, handcuffed and escorted by policemen.

The news of the recovery of the Van Metre Diamond was plastered in the headlines the next day. I read the accounts with relish, particularly the parts about the anonymous phone call. I don't know if Baldy and No-

neck ever figured out who the caller was. I'd prefer they didn't.

It will only be a matter of time before they catch the lovely lady who rented the apartment. In a way I hope they don't. She was, after all, partly responsible for their capture. The lingering fragrance of her expensive perfume was what tipped me off. I'll bet there aren't more than two or three people in this town who can afford that stuff.

It was the real Van Metre Diamond, of course. No one, not even Henri, can make a copy good enough to fool real experts. For that matter, Henri couldn't make a copy at all. But he cooks a great *canard à l'orange*. He's the head chef at Le Pommier Restaurant here in town. You really should try it sometime.



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The police were sure Beal had committed suicide . . .



"Mr. Nudger?" she said.

I said yes.

"It ain't every private detective that has a leaky trailer for an office." She closed her umbrella and stepped into my twelve-by-forty home and office.

"I like it," I told her. "I'm into moss and mushrooms."

She was a weary-looking blonde, about forty, with brown eyes, a squar-

WHERE IS HARRY BEAL?

ish homely face, and a nice shape except for thick ankles. "I want to hire you to find Harry Beal," she said.

"Who is?"

"My friend. More than a friend—my lover for the past year."

"How do you mean he's lost?"

"The police found his coat, shoes, and tie on the Jefferson Bridge last week."

"He sounds lost in the worst way," I said, motioning for the woman to sit down on the undersized sofa. "You haven't told me your name."

"Helen Farrow. I'm a cocktail waitress at the Blue Bull on Seventh Avenue."

I poured myself another cup of morning coffee, offering a cup to Helen Farrow, who refused. "So you've gone to the police?"

"They think Harry committed suicide."

"Why don't you think that?"

"The evening of his death, the police received a call from a public phone booth near the bridge. It was Harry, saying someone had threatened to kill him and was following him. When a patrol car got to the booth there was no one around, but they found Harry's clothes on the bridge."

"If someone murdered him, it isn't likely they'd remove his coat, shoes, and tie. Is that what leads the police to believe it was suicide?"

"That's what they say."

But I knew that what had led to the easy conclusion of suicide was an undermanned and overworked police force. Lieutenant Catlin had told me about the department's troubles often enough.

"Have you got a photograph of Beal?"

She shook her head no.

"If it was murder, Beal's as dead as if it was suicide," I told her. "Either way, if a body hasn't washed up, the river's still got him—or maybe the ocean. People have jumped from that bridge and never been found."

"I don't think it was murder or suicide," she said stubbornly. "Neither one makes sense. I've drawn out all my savings. I want you to try to find Harry—alive."

"That sounds impossible."

"I know. But I'm paying your price and then some." A light came into her tired eyes that suggested a flinty toughness, an unexpected fineness of character to complement her desperation. She was one of those people

who refuse to acknowledge hopelessness until they absolutely have to. "Harry was sort of my last chance, Mr. Nudger. And you're my last chance to find him."

I sighed, slid open a shallow desk drawer, and got out one of my contracts for Helen Farrow to sign, reflecting that it was this type of case that invariably brought me pain and eventually would kill me. Still, I would take it. "Don't be optimistic," I told her.

But she was. I could tell. What's the matter with people?

Lieutenant Charles Catlin looked up from behind the desk in his sparse, efficient office at police headquarters. The office was the standard pale green that needed a fresh coat of paint and the drone of a dispatcher directing squad cars drifted in from a speaker in the booking area. From a portrait on the wall behind the desk, the commissioner seemed to be looking with stern disapproval over Catlin's shoulder.

"Hello, Nudger," Catlin said indifferently. He is a hulking man whose primal features belie a keen mind. "What brings you to this den of anti-crime?"

"I'm on a job."

"The yellow pages strike again."

I sat down in the uncomfortable wooden chair alongside Catlin's desk.

"Harry Beal," I said.

He nodded. "I talked to the girl he left behind him. She refuses to believe."

"She needs reassurance," I told him, "one way or the other. Fill me in on the case."

I knew Catlin would honor my request. We trade favors like Monopoly money. We both know neither of us is going to get rich in the real world.

Catlin repeated, in essence, Helen Farrow's short sad account of the night of Beal's disappearance.

"So why a finding of suicide?" I asked.

"Because there's more evidence suggesting suicide than there's evidence suggesting murder or accidental death—this year's budget being what it is."

"What about Beal himself?"

"Forty-eight years old, Caucasian, worked as an office-equipment salesman, no living relatives."

"Did his clothes tell you anything?"

WHERE IS HARRY BEAL?

"Check with Denning in the lab if you want. I'm busy with more important things." He made a slight waving motion with the back of his hand and began filling out a form on his desk. Charm wasn't his strong suit.

I left and took the elevator down to the lab.

Denning recognized me and nodded a friendly hello. We discussed our mutual revulsion for Catlin, then I asked Denning to tell me whatever he could about Harry Beal.

"He wore a size ten shoe, a 44-regular coat, and favored loud neckties." He led me to where Beal's effects were stored, sliding open a metal file drawer long enough to contain a body.

The shoes were black wingtips, the suit coat a medium-priced material and blue, the tie a violent red, yellow, and grey. The soles of the shoes were about half worn, and there had been nothing in the suit-coat pockets.

"Anything off the record?" I asked.

"There were a few strands of red hair on the suit coat," Denning said. "Dyed, I think."

"Helen Farrow's hair is dyed blonde."

"Who's Helen Farrow?"

"Beal's girl friend. My client."

"Poor woman." He looked at me with his lab-man's myopic gaze.

I left him without a kind word and drove my battered brown VW Rabbit to Helen Farrow's apartment. On the way I reviewed what I knew about the case, managed to start my nervous stomach churning, and popped an antacid tablet into my mouth. I have the knack but not the nerves for my profession.

Helen Farrow's apartment was in a declining part of town, on the third floor of a drab brick building with a chipped gargoyle on each side of the entrance. The apartment itself was small, cheaply furnished, and almost antiseptically clean and ordered. Helen Farrow was the kind who needed to know where things were and why. She let me in and I told her I'd come from headquarters.

"What did you find out?" she asked me.

"That Beal wore wingtip shoes. It's a start." I sat in a small vinyl chair and watched her pace. She stopped near a window overlooking the street and lighted a cigarette.

"Where did Beal work?" I asked.

"Gavner Enterprises, downtown. The police questioned Mr. Gavner, and I talked to him on the phone. He says Harry seemed depressed before his disappearance."

"I'll talk to Gavner," I told her, "but he'll most likely give me the same answers he gave the police."

She turned and stared at me, inhaling smoke from her cigarette as if it hurt her. I knew she wanted some words of encouragement. My opinion was that at that moment Harry Beal was somewhere underwater, being nibbled by the fishes. But Helen wouldn't have been encouraged to hear that, so I left the apartment without saying anything.

Gavner Enterprises occupied an inconspicuous suite of offices in an inconspicuous building downtown. There was no receptionist in the small modern outer office, so I followed instructions on a sign telling visitors to press a button and wait.

Soon a voice boomed from the inner office, telling me to enter. I thought it was a bit unbusinesslike but I went in anyway.

The round-shouldered, grey-haired man behind the cluttered desk didn't stand as he acknowledged he was Gerald P. Gavner but he offered his hand. He appeared to be in his early fifties, but there was a keen and vital gleam in his eyes that suggested he might be an aging Romeo who chased the office girls around their desks.

I soon discovered I'd misinterpreted that gleam.

"I didn't approve of Beal living with that woman out of wedlock," Gavner said in a clipped, concise voice. "That might be an old-fashioned point of view, but I think that kind of behavior reflects on the company. Still, the man was my best salesman and I attribute his living with the woman to the depression he seemed to slide into the year before his suicide."

"Depression?"

"Oh, some people probably wouldn't have noticed. But Beal was usually such an enthusiastic person that for him normal behavior constituted depression. The woman probably never saw his real character and didn't realize he was in a depressed state."

"A year is a long time to stay depressed," I said.

"He might have pulled out of it if it hadn't been for the Farnworth murder."

My stomach jumped at the word "murder." "I don't know the case."

"Farnworth was the man who was tried and acquitted six years ago for the murder of Beal's wife and daughter in Texas. The feeling is that he was actually guilty but that he bought his way out of a conviction. Then, when Farnworth was killed last month, the police naturally suspected Beal. He had an ironclad alibi—wasn't within a thousand miles of the crime—but he was still questioned. Old wounds must have been opened, and I think that's what led him to do what he threatened."

"Beal had threatened suicide?"

"He'd made subtle references to it." Gavner folded his waxy hands, flashing a diamond pinky ring, and raised quizzical eyebrows. "Did the police tell you?"

"Our relationship is such that they seldom go into great detail."

I left Gavner and drove back to headquarters, where I was lucky enough to find Catlin still in.

"Tell me about the murder of Beal's wife and daughter," I said.

"It's irrelevant," he answered, "so I don't mind telling you." He leaned back in his squeaky swivel chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "Six years ago a wealthy womanizer named Farnworth was having an affair with Beal's wife. He turned out to be more than a little kinky. He strangled the wife and fourteen-year-old daughter—or at least he was arrested and tried for the murders. Money being all-important in this world, some key witnesses changed their testimony and Farnworth was acquitted."

"How did Beal react?"

"He took his insurance money and moved north to start over."

"What about Farnworth being murdered?" I asked.

"That happened two months ago, in Galveston. His body was discovered in a hotel. He'd been tortured before he was killed."

"So the law went to Beal as the logical suspect."

Catlin nodded. "Only Beal couldn't have killed Farnworth. He was in New York at the time, at a company meeting. His boss, Gavner, and William Davis, Gavner Enterprises' New York office manager, swore to it. At the exact time of Farnworth's death in Galveston Beal was in conference in New York, discussing a new line of interlocking file cabinets. I can show you Gavner's statement and the signed deposition the NYPD obtained from Davis." He smiled his ugly smile. "Like I told you—it's irrelevant."

I was prepared to admit that the Farnworth murder probably had nothing to do with Beal's disappearance, but my stomach sensed otherwise. I unpeeled the foil from a roll of white discs, popped one into my mouth, and chewed reflectively.

"I bet you're developing an ulcer," Catlin said concernedly. "For your own sake, why don't you get into some other line of work and never come back here?"

"Tempting," I said, and meant it.

After leaving Catlin, I decided to pay another visit to Gavner and find out what, if anything, Beal had said to him about the Farnworth murder, and to discover Beal's reaction when he'd been informed of Farnworth's death. I phoned Gavner Enterprises from a booth on Twelfth Street, but a recorded voice informed me that Mr. Gavner was out and asked if I'd like to leave a message. After the tone, I informed the recorder that I had no message to leave and hung up. Apparently Gavner had departed for home after a hard day's work.

I stopped for a quick supper at a Culinary Cow steakhouse, took two antacid tablets, drove back to my trailer, and went to bed.

After sleeping late the next morning, I drove downtown to Gavner Enterprises and found the door locked. The building manager told me that Gavner had moved out the day before. He'd rented the office on a month-to-month basis and had left no forwarding address. I talked the manager into letting me into the empty office in the hope of finding some clue as to where Gavner had gone, but the place was so bare it might as well have been hosed clean.

When I phoned Catlin to tell him about Gavner's sudden move, he seemed surprised but not particularly aroused.

"Moving isn't a crime," he said, "even if it is unusually fast."

"Maybe you ought to tell me what your investigation turned up on Gerald Gavner," I said.

"I'll indulge you," he said, and excused himself to get the file on Gavner. "Gavner was born in Plinton, Georgia," Catlin said, "on August 20th, 1929. He lived in Georgia most of his life, then moved north to start Gavner Enterprises, which sells business equipment to various companies nationwide." Gavner had told the police he was single and listed his address as the Hawthorn Arms, a luxury apartment building on the west side of town.

"If you turn anything up," Catlin told me, "share it."

"You'd probably consider it irrelevant," I said, and hung up.

I was perspiring, and my stomach felt as if it were trying to digest metal filings. This wasn't my kind of case. When you get involved with murderers, things can get violent. The last time one of my cases turned violent, I was badly hurt. Though I didn't want that to happen again, I knew I was caught in currents I couldn't control. I drove to the plush Hawthorn Arms, asked for Gerald P. Gavner.

I was told the expected—that Gerald P. Gavner had moved out. He'd paid the last two months of the lease on his furnished apartment the day before, and the doorman had helped him with his two large suitcases and summoned a taxi.

I phoned Helen Farrow from the lobby and brought her up to date. She asked me to meet her at her apartment in an hour.

"I want you to find out about Gavner for me," she said as soon as I'd stepped in from the hall. "Whatever happened to Harry, Gavner knows about it."

"Not necessarily," I cautioned her. "There might be no connection. Gavner could have something to hide, and the police questioning him about Beal's death might have made him figure it was time to move on. Anyone investigating Beal's disappearance would be likely to tumble onto anything illegal Gavner Enterprises might have been involved in."

"I want you to investigate Gavner anyway," Helen persisted. She was smoking another cigarette in that seemingly painful manner. "Go to wherever he's from—find out everything."

"You're talking about money, Helen. More than I want to charge and more than you can pay."

She smiled and handed me something small, neatly folded and faintly scented. It was a thousand-dollar bill.

"Ten of those came yesterday in the mail," she said. "There wasn't any note or anything in the envelope—just the ten bills." Her drab eyes brightened with the hope she was living on. "It means Harry's alive. I think you can find him through Gavner."

I asked her to show me the envelope the money had arrived in. It was a cheap manila envelope with her name and address typed on it. There was no return address.

"This could be Beal's way of telling you thanks and goodbye," I told

her. She'd thought of that, judging by her guarded expression and the glint of tears in her eyes. "But what I think is happening," I continued, "is that we've scared somebody, and the money is that person's way of trying to buy you off so you'll stop searching for Beal."

"I want to use the money to find him," she said fervently.

"I don't know if that's smart, Helen. If it is someone trying to buy you off, he may try to stop you some other way."

Her answer was to hand me another thousand-dollar bill. "Use as much of it as you have to," she said. "Buy whatever information you need. I can't think of any way I'd rather spend the money." She glared challengingly at me. "I'm not afraid. Are you?"

"Yes. But I'll go to Gavner's hometown and start digging if you'll promise to put the rest of the money in the bank and keep your doors locked."

She smiled again. Soft light from the curtained window highlighted her features, and I decided that twenty years ago she must have been passable. "It's a deal," she said.

I was on the afternoon flight to Atlanta, and from the Atlanta airport I drove a rented car west to Plinton, Georgia. Plinton was a small town, and it didn't take me long to discover that the Gavner family, with their boy Gerald, had moved in 1930 to Carver, a hundred miles south.

In the small farming town of Carver I discovered some members of the Gavner family still living there. They told me that Gerald Gavner had died of internal injuries after being struck by a car. They gave me directions to his grave, and I stood in the neatly kept little cemetery and looked at the dates carved on the weather-smoothed tombstone: August 20, 1929-June 12, 1933.

I knew then what had happened. Someone had assumed Gerald Gavner's identity, obtaining a copy of his birth certificate from Plinton and using it to obtain various identification documents from library cards and gasoline credit cards to a driver's license, possibly even working up to a social-security card. It's often done in the underworld, and the identification will stand up under a cursory investigation. The name on all the identification belongs to someone long dead, but someone who existed long enough to provide the foundation for the structure of phony identification. It's handy if the bearer of all that I.D. wants to engage in something illegal—like the operation of a dummy company to serve as a front for something profitable but risky.

WHERE IS HARRY BEAL?

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I wanted to find out more about Gavner Enterprises, and I knew who could tell me. After booking into a motel on the outskirts of Carver, I phoned Helen and told her I was flying to New York the next day.

William Davis had vacated the New York office of Gavner Enterprises with the same abruptness with which Gavner himself had vacated the home office. So if Gavner had been involved in something crooked, Davis was too.

The New York office, in an undistinguished building on East Fifty-third Street, had been emptied as thoroughly as the home office, except for a skinny girl who was cleaning out the receptionist's desk and looking forlorn.

She said her name was Millie Ann and that Mr. Davis had given her notice the day before and left immediately.

"Left for where?" I asked.

She shook her frizzy blonde head. "He didn't say. I didn't think it was my place to ask. I've only been working here a few months, part-time."

"Don't you have any idea? It's important, and I know he'd want to see me."

Millie Ann paused in her efforts to stuff several magazines and bottles of nail polish into a small paper bag. I could see she was debating with herself—and that she was miffed at losing her job on such short notice.

"You might try the Hangout—it's a bar on Fifty-second Street. Mr. Davis went there sometimes. Talk to Frank, the bartender."

"Were Frank and Mr. Davis friendly beyond a bartender-customer relationship?"

"I don't know." She rolled a romance magazine tightly. "But I was in there last night with my boy friend and I saw Mr. Davis come in, talk to Frank, and hand him a big yellow envelope and some money. He acted real nervous. The skin under one of his eyes was jumping around, like."

"Did he see you?"

"No."

"What does Mr. Davis look like?" I asked.

She frowned. "Average size, I guess. About forty-five, maybe a little more. Not too bad-looking—red hair, a nice smile. He dressed pretty neat."

I thanked Millie Ann, told her I hoped she'd find work soon, and left.

The Hangout was a respectable-looking if dim lounge, with a long padded bar worked by a lanky man with a gleaming bald head and a down-turned moustache.

"Frank the bartender, I presume," I said, sitting near the end of the bar where he was stacking glasses.

He nodded and gave me a puzzled smile. I ordered a beer.

When he'd brought the beer I asked him if he knew where I could find Bill Davis.

He didn't pretend not to know Davis, but he shrugged and shook his head.

"It's important to both Davis and me that I find him," I said, placing a hundred-dollar bill on the bar.

Frank looked solemnly at the hundred. "I don't know where he is. If I did know, I'd tell you for sure."

"What about the envelope he gave you?"

Frank seemed surprised.

"That won't tell you where he's at."

"Did Davis say what was in the envelope?" My hand reached out as if to withdraw the crinkled bill on the bar.

"Sure," Frank said hastily, and my hand paused. He watched my hand. "All that's in it are some other smaller envelopes, addressed to somebody I never heard of. I'm supposed to mail one the first of every month for the next year."

"Let me look at one of those envelopes," I said. "Mr. Davis would want you to show it to me—believe me." I drew another hundred-dollar bill from my pocket and held it casually.

Frank shrugged as if the matter were really of no importance, went to a small safe in a cabinet behind the bar, and bent over it for a few minutes. Then he returned with a small white envelope. When I released my grip on the second bill and let it drop on top of the first, he set the envelope on the bar so I could read the address: "Mr. Norman Llewelyn, Hill Manor, Hillsboro, Missouri."

The next afternoon I turned my rented Chevy into a driveway beside a freshly painted metal sign lettered HILL MANOR—REST HOME. Though only about fifty miles southwest of the St. Louis city limits, Hillsboro was very country, and Hill Manor was secluded well off the main highway in low, densely wooded hills.

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As I followed the curve of the narrow blacktop drive, the rest home came into view. It was a rambling three-story white frame structure that looked like a modernized and enlarged farmhouse. The grounds were neatly kept, the grass green and mowed beneath the two large elms that flanked the steps onto a wide grey-floored porch. A few people sat reading in the rocking chairs that lined the porch. They ignored me as I parked the car and went in through the double-doored entrance.

I was in a large, cool reception area. A television room off to the left emitted the sounds of soap opera. Beneath a large brass chandelier was a counter, and behind the counter stood a bespectacled elderly woman in a white uniform.

"I'm here to see Mr. Norman Llewelyn," I told her through one of my best smiles.

"He's in 326, at the end of the hall on the third floor," the woman said. "I'll ring upstairs and have someone tell him you're on your way up. What name should I give?"

"I'd rather surprise him," I said, and before she could answer I leaned over the counter and spoke confidentially. "I'm an old friend, and I came here primarily to make sure all of his bills are being paid."

"Oh, there's no problem there," she assured me. "Mr. Llewelyn has a wealthy aunt who sends cash every month to cover his expenses."

I nodded to her and walked toward the wide stairway.

When I entered Room 326 without knocking, Llewelyn was sitting in a wicker chair by a tall window, gazing down at something. His back was to me, and I saw only a slumping, grey-haired form haloed by the fading afternoon light. One finger was rhythmically tapping the arm of the chair.

I said, "Hello, Harry Beal."

He turned and jumped halfway out of the chair, then sank back. His mobile face went through a series of expressions and settled on a pasty, resigned smile.

"I don't know what you're talking about or who you are," he said in a calm voice, but without real conviction. "My name is Norman Llewelyn. I'm here for a rest cure."

"You'd have succeeded but for Helen Farrow," I told him. "You had to murder Farnworth; you devoted your life to his death, planned it for six years. But with such a strong motive to kill him, you knew that even if he had seemed to die accidentally the police would suspect you of killing him. So you manufactured the perfect alibi for yourself. You used

the names of dead people and their records of birth to build several identities—taking months, maybe years to establish them. You created synthetic lives—witnesses to provide you with a completely leakproof alibi for the time of Farnworth's murder."

"Whoever Farnworth is or was, I've never heard of him before." The wicker chair creaked softly.

"You were in New York, Gavner said—but *you* were Gavner. Davis corroborated your presence there—but *you* were Davis. You knew the Davis statement would be done by deposition, without the same people seeing either Gavner or Davis. But you effected mild disguises so your descriptions would differ. You wore a red wig as Davis, and you were careful not to stand up in your phony Gavner Enterprises office as Gavner so I wouldn't get an estimate of your height or build."

He began to squirm, a tic began under his right eye. "You're insane," he told me. Then his voice slipped into the concise efficient cadence of Gavner. "I demand that you leave—now!" Again his face and voice changed. He seemed to be slipping from personality to personality of the identities he'd created, as if the real Harry Beal had become lost among the long-dead.

"I didn't figure on her loving me," he said finally, in a slow natural voice that probably was his own.

"You needed someone like Helen Farrow to substantiate your death," I said. "You phoned her to establish the possibility of murder, but left your clothes on the bridge to suggest suicide. That way, if the police suspected anything it would be your murder—and that would throw off the idea of you faking a suicide to go underground after killing Farnworth. Helen would keep the law moving in that direction if it was disposed to investigate your death."

"I didn't figure on her loving me," Beal repeated in a hoarse voice. "Not that much . . ."

I didn't know if he was actually mad or not. Llewelyn was just another of his carefully contrived false identities, the one he'd kept in reserve to slip into when his scheme was finished. He planned to stay at Hill Manor until he felt well enough to check out and return to New York, to reclaim what was left of the money he'd earmarked for his recuperation and left to be mailed regularly from the Hangout.

Leaving him slumped in the wicker chair, I walked from the suddenly stifling room and went downstairs to use the phone at the desk.

But I never completed the call.

I heard screams, then a commotion beyond the French windows at the far end of the reception area. I put down the receiver and went with the white-uniformed woman from behind the counter as she ran to open the French windows.

Beal was sprawled on the stones of the patio, where he had landed after plunging from his window.

This time he was definitely dead.

Standing there staring at his pathetically contorted corpse, I saw no real point in contacting the law. The easiest course for everyone was to keep Beal's death a suicide on the Jefferson Bridge—in another place, another time.

Amid hushed voices, sobbing, and confusion, I made my way around the side of the building to my rented car and drove away.

I would go home and explain to Helen Farrow that Beal was dead and better off that way, and that now she should pick up what was left of her life and forget him. I cringed at the thought of telling her—but hadn't I warned her when I accepted the case that she'd be disappointed?

As Beal had discovered, sometimes it's impossible to convince the Helen Farrow of the world of anything they refuse to believe.

I stopped for a red light and chewed an antacid tablet as I waited for it to change.

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She was a shoplifter, and one of the best . . .

GETTING THE GOODS

by

BRUCE M.
FISHER

She was a shoplifter and a good one. She had been boosting the Westmere Shopping Mall for almost two years and hadn't been suspected yet. She had innocent blue eyes, nimble hands, and a leather handbag, neither too large nor too small, which she always carried on her left arm.

It was like a conjuring trick. While her right hand did the misdirecting, her left hand did the work. It seized the desired article, curled back, and dropped it into the handbag she opened with her little finger. Her elbow

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pressed the clasp shut against her hip smoothly and naturally, without drawing attention. She had practiced a long time to perfect that swan's-neck movement; she could make the handbag slide up and down her left arm as if it had life of its own.

There were many dangers, of course. Some clerks were sharp—their eyes were never still. Customers too timid to try it themselves were always a hazard. Hired spotters, male and female, would appear at irregular times, browsing through one store or another, always buying some trifle to keep their cover intact. And there were the security guards, all looking alike in their rusty green uniforms.

These were the boys who were likely to stop you in the wide corridors of the Mall after you passed the checkout counter, to search your handbag or parcels for stolen goods. She had noticed, however, that they preferred to do it completely outside the Mall and, by leaving you not an eye-blink of excuse, really get the goods on you. But she didn't fear them. She had confidence.

Lack of confidence was the betrayer. Skilled though you might be, there was always a breathlessness, a hesitation perhaps, or a too-sudden movement or maybe a sidelong glance, a fleeting shadow of anxiety, a tautness, a too casual departure from one counter to another. In a hundred tiny ways, lack of confidence gave you away.

Confidence, on the other hand, lent an aura of respectability. It put you on the right side of that fine line between the honest browser and the thieving one. And she had it. Not mere confidence in her ability but total confidence in *knowing* she would never be caught.

So it was that when she left the Westmere Mall one day and felt an authoritative tap on her right shoulder, she turned and said, "Yes?" in a tranquil, unworried tone.

The security guard was tall, well built, and fairly good-looking, even in the rusty green uniform. "I'm sorry, Miss. I must search your handbag."

"My handbag? What on earth for?"

"Stolen goods, Miss."

"Stolen goods!" Her innocent blue eyes widened perceptibly. "Good heavens," she breathed, "you think I'm a shoplifter!"

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "I have orders."

"Orders!" she gasped—a pretty young lady astounded and angry at having her honesty questioned. "Well, of all the *nerve!*"

He pushed his cap back, exposing curly black hair. "Please, Miss."

He practically had her caged against the red brick of the Mall. In a moment he would take the handbag by force. She moved slightly sideways. "And just what," she demanded, "am I supposed to have stolen?"

"A camera and a rather expensive cigarette lighter, possibly more. For your sake, I hope my information is incorrect. Now, if you don't mind—"

"Oh, all right," she said, sliding the handbag from her arm. "All right!"

There was a swift rush of sneakered feet and the bag was snatched from her slack hand. A lanky form sprinted away and vanished around the corner with the evidence.

The guard said, "Damn!"

The girl screeched, "Stop, thief! Stop, thief!" at the top of her lungs.

The guard studied her intently. "Why are you yelling like that? He just saved your bacon, and you know it!"

"Oh," she said airily, "I always screech when my purse is snatched."

"Do you now?"

"Of course I do." Her eyes were bright, her pretty lips quivering. She was laughing at him, and he knew it.

He looked at her thoughtfully. "Well, Miss, I'm sorry to have bothered you. And I hope you get your handbag back. I really do."

She was still smiling when she got back to the apartment. Harley had dumped the contents of her handbag onto the table and was studying the camera.

"You should try out for the Olympics," she said. "Talk about speed! You were gone before he got his feet braced. Your timing was perfect."

"I know," he said matter-of-factly.

"Maybe I'd better switch to another Mall."

"Yes, one where you aren't known." He put the camera, lighter, watch, and other articles into a small leather valise. "I'll take these down to Jake tonight."

Something in the way he said it warned her to be extra careful after this. He had saved her today and he would save her again if necessary, but not a third time. Because nothing must interfere with his nightly excursions. And if she did she'd be out on her own again.

She was feeling the first pangs of dismay when he said, "I think I'll lie down for a while." He tossed his head in that reckless way she found so attractive and gave her a look that made her toes tingle. "Coming?"

Then everything was all right again. . .

The Cumberland Mall was on the far side of town. She spent a week acquainting herself with the layout, assessing the many stores and shops, choosing her exits, spotting the spotters, making her plans. The security guards here wore blue-grey uniforms of a more casual cut. Sometimes she saw as many as four wandering around, alike in their visored caps and expressions of infinite boredom.

She was soon practicing her art again, making things disappear from shelves and counters. Her old confidence returned. She did well. Harley was pleased. Life went on as usual.

Then, suddenly, it didn't.

She couldn't figure out how they caught on so quickly.

She had just left the mall with some fine jewelry in her bag when a hand tapped her on the right shoulder. She turned and said, "Yes?" in a tranquil, unworried tone.

The security guard was tall, well built, and not bad-looking in his blue-grey uniform. "I'm sorry, Miss," he said, "I must search your handbag."

"What on earth for?"

"Stolen goods, Miss."

"Stolen goods!" Her innocent blue eyes widened. "Good heavens," she breathed, "you think I'm a shoplifter! Well, of all the *nerve!*"

He held out his hand. "Please, Miss."

He had her backed against the wall. In another moment, he would politely take the handbag from her. She moved sideways a bit. "Oh, all right," she said, sliding the handbag from her arm. "All *right!*"

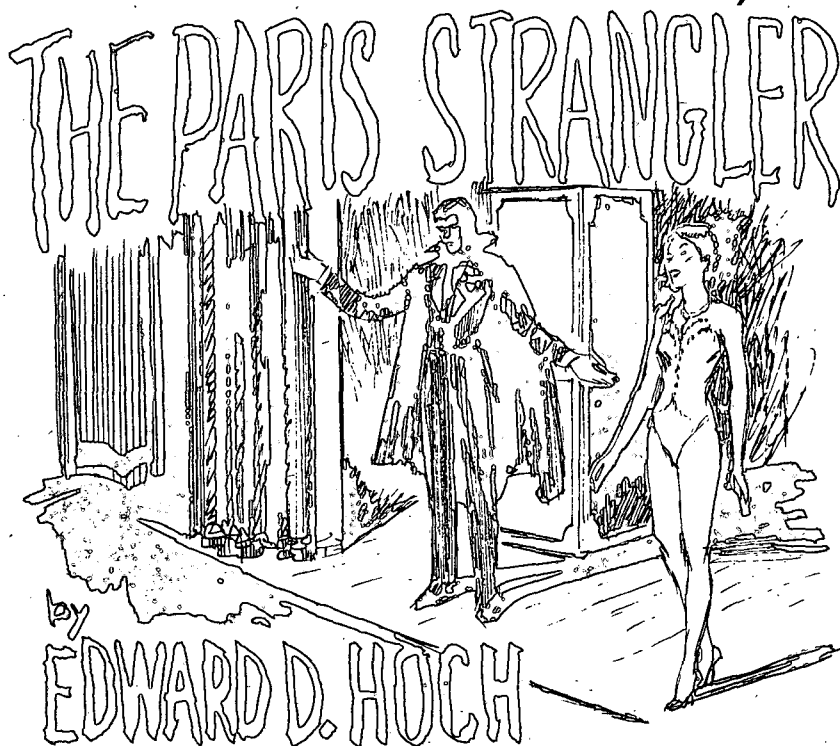
There was a swift rush of sneakered feet and the handbag was whipped from her slack hand. At the same instant, the guard gripped her right wrist and, using her as a pivot, swung his long body down and around in a sweeping curve. His hard boot met a soft sneaker with crippling force and Harley soared through the air and landed face down on the pavement. The girl, yanked sideways, fell on top of the guard. When he helped her up she saw that his cap had fallen off, exposing curly black hair, and she recognized him.

"You!" she gasped. "What are you doing at this mall?"

"Oh," he said, "I always ask to be transferred when a shoplifter puts one over on me."

His eyes were bright, his lips quivering. He was laughing at her. And she knew it.

Karen was working her way through the Sorbonne as a magician's assistant . . .



It was the weekend of Thanksgiving recess at Dunbar College, and the campus was nearly deserted as Ned walked across the quadrangle through little eddies of dead leaves. He had asked directions to Professor Karen Veldt's office, though he didn't really believe he'd find her there. It wasn't until he saw the flash of her jeans through the open office door that his pulse began to race.

"Hello," he said. "May I come in?"

She turned, startled, and showed him a face that had hardly aged in the twelve years since Paris. At thirty-seven she was still a lovely woman.

"Ned Spearling! This is a surprise!"

"A pleasant one, I hope."

"What other kind could it be? How long has it been?"

"Twelve years this month."

"Imagine that!" She tossed the dark hair back from her face in a gesture he'd never forgotten. "How did you find me here?"

"The newspaper ran an article on new faculty members. I read it this morning and I had to come out. Even though it's a holiday weekend, I took a chance on your being here."

She glanced down at his hands. "No rings. Not even your old class ring."

"I stopped wearing that a long time ago. After Paris."

"Are you married?"

He nodded. "A house in the suburbs and a partnership in the city's best law firm. I guess I'm a success."

"Settled down. I suppose I am too. Settled down—not married. But I wish you'd called me first." She motioned toward her jeans. "After twelve years you deserve something a bit more glamorous. I wore my work clothes today. I'm trying to whip this office into shape."

"You look fine to me," he said. "But then you always did." It was the sort of flirtatious remark he hadn't made to a woman in years. "Do you like teaching here?"

She grinned at the question, or at his assessment of her looks—he couldn't be sure which. "It beats being a magician's assistant."

"You left Paris suddenly," he said, his voice serious.

"I—had to."

"Do you ever tell your students about those Paris days?"

"Do you think they'd believe it?"

"I lived through it, and I'm not sure *I* believe it. Sometimes I wake in the morning wondering if it was all a dream." He paused. "I suppose that's really why I came to see you, Karen. About the stranger."

She sighed and looked away, suddenly busying herself by returning a pile of books to their freshly dusted shelves. "I've put all that out of my mind, Ned," she said. "It was twelve years ago. I was a different person."

"Sure. We all were. But I was just wondering. It's not something I can put out of my mind easily."

Karen sat down. "Did you come out here just to ask me about the strangler?"

He tried to make a joke of it. "That's as good an excuse as any, isn't it?" But he wondered in his own mind what *had* been the main reason for the visit—to see Karen again after twelve years, or to ask her about the strangler?

The strangler.

He'd claimed it was just an excuse to see her, but Paris in those days would always be as much a memory of the strangler as of Karen. The strangler—a shadowy presence who moved unseen through the alleys of the Left Bank.

The killings began about the time Ned arrived in Paris, in the Autumn of 1967. He'd graduated from law school the previous Spring, and the course in international law he was taking at the Sorbonne was more an excuse for a vacation than anything else. There was plenty of student unrest that Autumn, which would climax in the May riots, six months in the future. Ned tried to avoid political involvement by spending his free time in his room or at one of the Left Bank cafés not usually frequented by students.

That was how he happened to meet Karen Veldt.

The first time he saw her was outside the Tournoi, a little basement café that kept students away by the simple expedient of charging too much for drinks. He saw her twice, as a matter of fact, since she was standing with two dark young men directly in front of a life-size cutout of herself in spangled tights, posed with legs apart and arms raised. On the other side of the entrance was an equally large cutout of a man in a black cape. Though his French was still a bit sketchy, Ned could see from the sign that they were performers, a magician and his lovely young assistant. The magician was not one of the young men with her at the moment.

He went inside and ordered a glass of wine. Presently the three young people came in and paused at the bar. When he heard her order some wine with an unmistakable Boston accent he felt free to address her.

"A fellow American!" he said. "I'm in luck."

She eyed him deliberately. "No, you're not," she said.

Up close she was shorter than he'd thought, with dark brown hair worn in a single braid that came down over her right shoulder. Her blue eyes

were deep and intense, with a bit of a slant that suggested a trace of oriental blood. Her cheekbones were high, her mouth and chin perfectly formed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean it to sound like a pickup. It was just the sound of an American voice—"

"Are you a student?" she asked.

"I'm doing postgraduate work in international law at the Sorbonne."

Her manner mellowed a bit. "I'm sorry if I sounded rude. I never know who'll turn up in this place. We don't get many students. I'm at the Sorbonne myself, working on my doctorate. I work here nights to help pay the tuition." She beckoned the two dark-haired men and introduced them. "I'm Karen Veldt, and these are my gypsy bodyguards, Aldo and Cozak."

"Ned Spearling." He shook hands with the gypsies. Aldo muttered something in French but Cozak was silent.

"I thought only wealthy women and Presidents' daughters had bodyguards," Ned said.

"Maybe I'm one of those," she answered with a grin. "Actually they're in our show. They've been escorting me around town since September. With this strangler business now I must admit I'm happy to have them."

Ned had read about the strangler. He'd killed three women so far, a few weeks apart, accosting them on the narrow streets of the Left Bank at night.

"What do you do in the magic show?" he asked.

"If you're still here in a half an hour you'll see for yourself. Condor is a very good magician. You'll like him."

So Ned stayed, and he had to admit the show was impressive. Condor appeared on stage wearing a long black cloak with a red lining, and even though there were only two dozen patrons in the café it didn't seem to bother him. He was a tall slim man with gaunt features, who would have made a good movie Dracula. He sped through the usual opening tricks alone, producing flowers, coins, and baby chicks out of thin air, then went on to a series of dazzling card tricks. After about ten minutes Karen joined him, wearing the spangled tights she displayed on the sign outside. The audience cheered and Ned noticed that a few more customers had drifted in, perhaps timing their arrival to her appearance on the tiny stage.

After a few standard tricks in which Karen posed nicely and assisted

Condor with the props, the two gypsies joined them on stage. While Condor bowed and went offstage, Aldo and Cozak placed Karen in a large sack which was then tied at the top. The sack was lifted into a brightly painted chest and the lid closed and locked. The gypsies drew pistols from their belts and fired at the chest in perfect unison, Aldo with his left hand and Cozak with his right. The chest was opened, the sack was untied, and out jumped Condor, smiling and bowing once more to the appreciative audience. Karen came on smiling from the wings.

"We'll be back in an hour with more illusions," the magician announced in French. He introduced Karen and the gypsies for more applause and then the curtain fell.

Karen came out to the bar in about five minutes, stopping to chat at one of the tables before joining Ned. "Did you like it?" she asked.

"Sure," he said, and meant it. He'd seen better magic acts in his day, but considering the setting and the limited space available the show had been quite professional.

"I'll get Condor over here so you can meet him," Karen said.

The magician appeared in a moment, and Karen led him between the tables to the bar where Ned was sitting. Up close, Condor was older than he'd appeared on stage—perhaps in his late forties. His face was lined and his eyes were tired. The spark Ned had seen on stage seemed to have vanished.

"That was a great show," Ned said, extending his hand.

"Thank you. If you can remain for our next act we hope you'll find it just as good."

"Have you been performing here long?"

"Only since September when Karen joined us. Before that I was touring around Europe with Aldo and Cozak. Adding a young woman to the act was the smartest thing I ever did." He smiled affectionately at her.

Condor was speaking English, though with an accent, and Ned asked, "Have you ever performed in America?"

"Once, briefly. I was on a television variety show there about ten years ago. But there was no demand for magic at the time." He raised a finger to the bartender, who placed a glass of white wine before him.

They chatted until it was time for Karen to get into her costume again. She disappeared backstage and Condor followed. Ned sat through another half hour of magic, admitting to himself that he was more impressed

with Karen Veldt's figure than with the dexterous fingers of her employer.

When she'd finished for the night, Ned suggested dinner at a nearby restaurant.

"What's the matter with here?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Don't you like a change of scene?"

She agreed and went to get her coat. As they left the side door of the Tournai he was surprised to see the two gypsies fall in behind them. "Do they follow you everywhere?" he asked despairingly.

Karen chuckled. "I told you they were my bodyguards."

"You think you need bodyguards with me?"

"I don't know. Maybe the strangler picks up girls exactly the same way you do."

"I hope you're joking."

"Of course I am. Can't you tell?"

He glanced over his shoulder at the two gypsies. "They make me uncomfortable. Don't they ever speak?"

"Cozak is a deaf mute," she explained, "and Aldo doesn't speak English. But while they may not talk, I promise you they won't eavesdrop either."

During dinner Aldo and Cozak sat at a nearby table, apparently ignoring them. It was a pleasant meal, though Karen kept the conversation on an impersonal level.

"If you won't tell me about yourself," Ned said finally, "at least tell me how some of the tricks are worked. How did you and Condor change places in the sack?"

She grinned. "You know magicians never reveal their tricks. I'd rather talk about myself."

"Fine! Do you have a family? Any brothers or sisters?"

"One sister, Susan. She's a reporter for a newsmagazine in Manhattan. A real career woman. Can you imagine?"

"Do you want something like that when you go back to the States?"

"I may not go back. Maybe I'll stay here being a magician's assistant till some wealthy Arab arrives to carry me off to the desert."

"Are there many of those around?"

"More than you'd think. They're beginning to grow rich on their oil."

"What about Condor? Does he ever make a pass at you?"

"That would be telling. Besides—what business is it of yours?"

"I'm just interested in you, that's all."

"Condor is a gentleman at all times."

"That can't be his real name," said Ned with a grin. "Where's he from?"

"West Germany, but he's performed in the East too. Aldo and Cozak joined his act in Poland. They've been with him a couple of years." Her face grew serious. "Polish gypsies were treated as badly as the Jews during the war. Both of them were born in concentration camps."

Ned glanced toward their table. "I'm sympathetic—but I still wish they wouldn't follow you everywhere."

The two bodyguards came along when Ned and Karen left the restaurant, trailing behind them through the dim streets.

The following night Ned went to the Tournoi again to see the magic act. This time when he walked her to her apartment she said something to Aldo in a language he didn't understand, and the two gypsies departed. He was pleased to know they weren't standing guard at the door when later that evening he slept with Karen for the first time.

Early the following morning, after he'd left Karen's apartment and headed home, a French girl was murdered just off the Boulevard St. Germain.

The strangler had claimed his fourth victim.

The Tournoi was owned by a man named Pierre Flet, who worked there occasionally in the evening but could always be found behind the bar during the day. He was a powerful man with a barrel chest and brooding eyes. As Ned's appearances at the café became more frequent, Pierre took to greeting him in the friendly manner reserved for regular customers. This night he motioned Ned over to the bar and introduced him to an attractive young woman with dark hair.

"Ned Spearling, this is Simone Delair. She is a dancer at the famous Crazy Horse Saloon."

"I'm pleased to meet you," she said. "You are Karen's friend?"

"I am. But she's never mentioned you."

Karen arrived just then, out of breath and flushed from the chilly air outside. "Is it any wonder? Keep away from him, Simone. He's mine!"

Ned was pleased. That was more than she had ever admitted to him in private. Simone directed her smile at Karen. "Where have you been? We were to meet here an hour ago!"

"I had a paper to turn in and the professor kept me waiting. I ran all the way here."

"I can see that," Simone said.

Pierre poured Karen a glass of white wine. "Take this and settle down. I'm glad you two girls are friends, but don't try to steal her away from us, Simone."

Karen chuckled and slipped out of her coat. "Can you imagine me prancing around naked on the stage of the Crazy Horse? This is quite enough show business for me, thanks."

Simone, it developed, had the job of recruiting talented girls for the Crazy Horse. She had approached Karen a while back, and though Karen declined the offer the two had remained friends. This day they were having lunch together, but now it had grown so late they decided to settle for something at the Tournoi. Pierre brought out a loaf of bread and set to work in the kitchen while they settled down at a table with their wine.

"Join us," Karen invited, and Ned didn't need to be asked twice.

Simone spoke mainly in French, but slowly enough so Ned could follow the conversation. She told long involved stories of men she had met through the show, most of the tales funny in a ribald way, and Ned thoroughly enjoyed himself.

"When will you come to see my show again?" Karen asked her when there was a pause in the conversation.

"Some night soon. I promise."

"Condor is working on some new tricks. He might even try sawing me in half!"

"That I've got to see!" Ned said.

Condor arrived a short time later, wearing his street cape and looking like a Parisian vampire. "A lovely young lady," he said to Simone, whom he had obviously met before. "Have you decided to fly away with me yet?"

"You have Karen—that should be enough for any man."

The magician glanced sadly at his assistant. "Would that I *really* had Karen. I can make her vanish much more easily than I can make her appear."

Simone picked up one of the café's printed paper napkins. "Sign this for me, Condor," she said. "Say something sweet. I want to make my boy friend jealous."

The magician sighed, took out a fat ballpoint pen, and scrawled a hasty message in French with his right hand while he anchored the napkin in place with his left. "Tell him I mean every word of it."

Simone giggled and tucked the napkin down the front of her blouse. Condor put away his pen and waved as he went backstage. "He is quite a man," Simone said.

Ned tore off a piece of warm bread from the loaf on the table.

"And you're quite a woman. I'll have to come see you at the Crazy Horse one of these nights."

"You'll see a great deal of her," Karen assured him.

That night she sent the gypsies home again and took Ned up to her little apartment. The show had gone well, attracting the largest crowd he'd seen, and Simone had even managed to get over for part of the last act. Pierre was pleased, and Condor was in rare form. "With an audience like that, I could give a great performance every night," he said.

Back at her apartment Karen was still excited too. "I really think we're building a following," she told Ned as she poured them both a drink. "We now have people who come back every night to see Condor."

He snorted. "Don't kid yourself—they come back to look at your legs."

"Why would they do that? At Simone's place they can see a lot more than legs."

He took the drink from her and brushed her lips with a kiss. "You just don't realize how you can excite men. Surely I'm not the first since you've been in Paris."

She waved her hand in a gesture of mock sophistication. "Oh, I have a different lover every night, of course. They wait for me at the stage door with roses and diamonds. Hadn't you noticed?"

"I haven't even noticed a stage door at Pierre's."

"There's barely a stage!"

"But I'm not the first, am I?"

She sat down beside him on the sofa. "You really want to know, don't you?"

"I guess so. Isn't it natural?"

"All right. There was one French boy, right after I started in the act. We had a little thing going, but it didn't amount to much. He came up here three times over a period of a couple of months. His name was Georges."

"What happened to him?"

"It was never anything serious. He got a job in Marseilles and took off for there. That was all before you. My months in Paris have been quite lonely."

"I'm glad."

"I'm not." She put her arms around him.

It was after one o'clock by the time he headed back to his tiny apartment. The night was clear but chilly, and he was nearly alone in the deserted streets. It wasn't until he was nearly home that he saw a caped figure cross the street about a block ahead and vanish into one of the alleys. The cape reminded him of Condor and he wondered if something had brought the magician out so late at night.

He was leaving his class at the Sorbonne the next afternoon when a man wearing a raincoat and hat intercepted him. "You are Ned Spearling?" he asked.

"That's me."

"Would you come along, please?"

"Come along where?"

The man showed a gold identification card with his photograph. "Police headquarters, in the Quai des Orfèvres. Just some routine questions."

"Questions about what? I'm not involved in the student unrest. I'm an American."

"We understand that, Monsieur. Please come along."

Ned looked about him helplessly. There seemed no alternative. Twenty minutes later, he was ushered into a large office overlooking the Seine.

"Chief Inspector Yonnet," a tall man said, extending his hand in introduction. "Please have a chair. I'm glad you could come in to help us."

"Did I have a choice?" Ned asked, wondering what he could know that was important enough to interest a Chief Inspector.

Yonnet conducted the questioning in English, speaking casually, and at first Ned was not aware of the secretary sitting behind him taking down the questions and answers. "You are a student here?"

"Yes, I'm studying international law at the Sorbonne. I have my law degree already. This is postgraduate work."

"Ah, a lawyer! How very good!"

"As a lawyer, I must insist on knowing the reason for these questions. Am I suspected of some crime?"

"We only want some information as to your movements last night," Inspector Yonnet said.

"Last night? I was at a friend's apartment for a time. Then I went home to bed."

"You must know there was a murder near your apartment early this morning—the fifth victim of the strangler who has been terrorizing our women."

"A murder? The strangler? No, I hadn't heard. But what does it have to do with me?"

"We believe you were acquainted with the victim. Her name was Simone Delair, and she was a dancer at the Crazy Horse Saloon."

The news hit him like a blow. "Simone—murdered? My God!"

"Then you did know her?"

"I met her for the first time yesterday. She was a friend of the young woman I was visiting last night."

The Inspector consulted the papers in front of him. "Mademoiselle Karen Veldt, a fellow American?"

"That's right."

"Yes—we have already questioned her."

"Then what more can I tell you?"

Yonnet reached into the desk drawer and brought out a large ring with a blue stone. Ned recognized it at once. "Have you seen this before?"

"Yes, it's mine. My class ring from law school. Where did you find it?"

Inspector Yonnet smiled sadly. "Near Mademoiselle Delair's body."

"What!"

"When did you last see it?"

Ned glanced at his bare finger. "A few days ago, I guess. I usually take it off when I wash my hands. I must have left it somewhere. I don't wear it all the time, and I suppose I thought it was back at my apartment."

"There is the possibility it came off in a struggle. In the dark you wouldn't have been able to find it."

"What is this?" Ned demanded. "Are you crazy enough to think I'm the strangler?"

"We are simply investigating all possibilities. You came here at the beginning of the autumn term at the Sorbonne, correct?"

"That's right."

"The first killing was on September 29th. The second was October 13th and the third November 5th. The fourth came just last week, on

the 27th, and the fifth was early this morning. You were in Paris on all of these dates?"

"Of course! And so were nine million other people."

The detective sighed. "This paper napkin from the Tournoi café was found on the body. Do you frequent the Tournoi?"

"Recently, yes."

"One of the previous victims had matches from the same café. We believe it to be more than a coincidence."

"Perhaps the strangler found my ring in the washroom at the café."

The Inspector considered that. "Certainly it is a possibility. Would you sign your name for me, please?" He gave Ned a pen and pencil.

"I doubt if you found my handwriting on any of the victims," Ned said as he signed his name.

"No," Yonnet agreed, "but I notice you're left-handed."

"Is that a crime?"

"Our strangler uses short lengths of rope which he slips around the victims' throats and knots in the back. It's possible to tell from the knot, and from a microscopic examination of the ropes, that the killer favors his left hand when performing this task. In other words, the strangler is left-handed—without a doubt."

Ned moistened his lips. For the first time he was frightened. "You can't be serious about all this."

"Two or more of the victims frequented the same café you did. The strangler is left-handed, as are you. The killings began shortly after you arrived in Paris. You admit knowing the latest victim. You have no good alibi for the time of the killing. And your ring was found near the body."

"I think I want a lawyer," Ned said quietly.

Karen came to visit him the following day. Her face went white when she saw him being led into the visitors' room. "This is insane," she said.

"That's what I've been trying to tell them," Ned agreed.

"Have you been formally charged?"

"No. They're only holding me on suspicion. But it doesn't look good. The press is clamoring for an arrest. I think they want to press charges even if it means losing the court case later. At least it'll look as if the police are doing something."

"And meanwhile the real strangler will probably leave town and let you take the blame."

"There's nothing I can do about it from a jail cell."

"Do you have a lawyer?"

He nodded. "But I'm hoping they'll come to their senses before there's a formal indictment."

"Do they have any evidence?"

"A lot of circumstantial things. Nothing important. Back in the States I'd be released already."

"Don't be too sure. Tell me everything."

He did, and she made notes in a little pad. After that she went away, promising to return.

It was the last time he would see her for twelve years.

The next morning, when he'd been in custody less than forty-eight hours, he was brought to Inspector Yonnet's office. "You're free to go," the Inspector said without preamble, avoiding Ned's eyes.

"What? I don't understand."

"You're free. The charges have been dropped."

"Is there some new evidence?"

"I don't care to discuss it. Your friend Karen Veldt can tell you if she wants. You have her to thank for getting you off."

He hurried back along the streets of the Left Bank to the little café where they had first met. But the front of the Tournai seemed strangely bare as he approached, and he realized that the life-size cutouts of Condor and Karen were gone.

"Where is she?" he asked Pierre.

The owner stared at him from behind the bar. "Gone. They're all gone."

"But where?"

Pierre shrugged. "Away. To another city."

"Didn't she leave a message?"

"No. No message."

Ned left the café and hurried to her apartment, but the story was the same. She'd taken her few belongings and left that morning. He had missed her by hours. At the Sorbonne they knew only that she hadn't attended classes for the past two days.

He scanned the papers for months after that, and took to buying German newspapers as well, searching for some advertisement for Condor's magic act. But there was nothing.

He went back to Inspector Yonnet, but the police were silent too. They considered him a fool to be asking so many questions when he should be happy merely to be free.

As for the newspapers, the student unrest was growing and they had other things to write about.

All anybody knew was that the stranglings ceased as suddenly as they had started.

Now, twelve years later, Ned had finally found Karen again. He stood in her small office on the campus of Dunbar College and said, "After all, you were the one who saved me from prison."

She smiled sadly. "The Inspector told you, I suppose."

"He told me to ask you, but you were already gone."

"We left quite suddenly, as I remember."

"But why, Karen? If you loved me enough to get me out of jail, why didn't you stay with me?"

"Was it love? I don't really know, and I doubt if you do either. We had known each other a very short time. And getting you out of jail was simply a matter of justice."

"But how did you do it? What did you tell Inspector Yonnet?"

"Was that his name?" Karen sighed. "I'd forgotten after all these years. What I told him was simple. I told him the real identity of the strangler, and the motive for his crimes."

"How did you know?" he asked. "Don't you understand? This is an unsolved mystery I've carried with me for twelve years now! How could you possibly have known who the strangler was?"

"I began with the assumption that it wasn't you. A foolish woman's assumption, some would say, but it was a starting point. If you weren't the strangler, then he was making a deliberate attempt to frame you. He'd somehow obtained that ring with your initials inside and left it near the scene of Simone's murder. My first question was how the killer obtained the ring."

"I used to take it off when I washed my hands."

"So you left it at school, or perhaps in the men's room at the café. This last seemed most likely to me, since the Inspector had already tied two of the victims to the Tournoi. And there was one other clue. The killings began about the time you arrived in Paris. But that was about the same time I arrived—the same time I joined Condor's act at the café. The

killings began after I joined the act; the victims were found—sometimes, at least—among the patrons of the café; and your ring had most likely been found by the killer in the men's room there. The conclusion was unmistakable. The strangler was someone, probably male, whom I knew from the Tournoi."

Somewhere in the depths of Ned's mind a memory stirred—the memory of a black-caped figure crossing the street and vanishing into an alley. "It was Condor, wasn't it?" he asked quietly.

"No," she answered, so softly he could barely hear the words. "No, it wasn't Condor. It was Aldo."

Ned stood very still. "Aldo? The gypsy? But how—?"

"It couldn't have been Condor because Condor was right-handed. Don't you remember the time he signed that napkin for Simone—the day before she died? And if you remember the disappearing act, when Aldo and Cozak fired pistols at the locked chest, you know that Aldo fired with his left hand and Cozak fired with his right."

"But you still couldn't have known for sure. What about the other people at the café? Pierre and the other bartenders? The customers who came to see your act?"

She turned toward the window. "You asked me why I went away after I spoke to Inspector Yonnet. Why I left the university and simply disappeared. I had to go, don't you see—because I was responsible for those five murders."

"Responsible? How could you be responsible?"

"On the night of the fourth murder I sent the gypsies away and invited you to my room. On the night of Simone's murder I did the same thing. I told you I'd had one previous lover that autumn—a French man—and that he'd come to my apartment three times over a two-month period. Three times, and there had been three murders before you and I met. I checked the dates and they were the same, and damn it, Ned, that's when I knew—he was killing someone every time I sent him away and had a man up to my apart—"

Her voice broke and she leaned against the window frame, sobbing. He went to her, not knowing what to say. After a moment he touched her arm. "God, Karen, why didn't you tell me?"

"I told Yonnet. I couldn't tell anyone else. I couldn't even face myself with it for a long time."

"What happened to Aldo?"

"He killed himself when the police came to arrest him. Condor and Cozak left town to avoid the police investigation and I left with them. I came back here to finish studying in America. I never heard from Condor again."

Ned nodded. "And with everyone gone, the police simply hushed it up. Much easier than answering questions once you'd left town."

She wiped her face and tried to smile. "So here I am, a professor at Dunbar College. And not one of my students knows I was once a magician's assistant."

"I'll never tell," he said.

"I hope not." She turned away from him again. "Goodbye, Ned."

He paused in the doorway. "Could I come out to see you sometime again?"

Karen stood very still without turning toward him. "What for?"

"Well, you never did tell me how you disappeared from that chest."

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Buchholz daydreamed of getting even . . .

GETTING EVEN

by
MIEL
TANBURN



My wife left me, but not for another man. She left for other men. Plural. "I'm not a housewife any more, Buck," she said. "Times are changing. So see you around maybe." And she moved into one of those singles places closer to town.

It galled me. Not just that she left me or even the lousy way she left me. It was what she put me through before she left me. I'd crawled. I'd begged. I'd made concessions. But a fat lot of good any of it did. She

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boned and gutted me like a fish and threw me out to decay in the garbage pit.

So my love turned to hate, and I mean hate. You can understand that. Did I want revenge? Ha! I'll give you three guesses. But ask me what I did about it. Nothing. That's right. Not a damn thing. If you haven't figured it out yet, I'm not exactly what you'd call a take-charge guy. Sure I daydreamed of getting even, but you know the old saying—if wishes were horses, beggars would ride. Well, I was still walking. All I got from my wishful thinking was a bad case of insomnia.

So I was having one of those restless nights when I kept waking up. It was two or three in the morning and I was having my usual nightmares about frustration and revenge. Besides, my throat was cold. A gun muzzle was pressing into it.

"Rise and shine, Buchnolz," a man said.

I don't remember getting up—I seemed to be lifted by the gun under my chin.

"In there," he said, shoving me toward the living room. "I want a good look first." He turned on the lamp and pushed me to the couch.

I was so scared I could hardly breathe. What scared me most was what I saw on the end of his automatic. A silencer. That meant he was serious.

"You're pathetic," he sneered. "If sweat was concrete you could pave a driveway."

He didn't have to tell me. I could feel it soaking through my pajamas.

"Who are you?" I didn't recognize the shaky voice that came from high in my throat.

"Someone who's waited a long time, Buchnolz." He was large and pale, with milky blue eyes, dark hair, and long sideburns trimmed diagonally, like daggers. Just from the way he pronounced my name I could tell he hated me. But why?

"There's some mistake," I said. My voice was still an octave high. "You don't even know me."

"Wrong," he said. He unwrapped a length of clothesline from his waist and tied my wrists together tightly. The binding cut into my flesh. "Go ahead and yell if you want," he said.

There was no point in my yelling and he knew it. I live out past the suburbs. There wasn't a neighbor to hear me within half a mile.

He tied my ankles and I said, "Do it, then. Get it over with." It had suddenly struck me how fitting it was for me to be executed by a psy-

chopath, for no apparent reason, in the middle of the night in my own living room. It was the perfect punchline to the bad joke of my life.

"Don't worry your ugly face," he said. "I'll do it. But first you listen. to me, Buchnolz."

With my hands and feet tied I was helpless. But what he didn't know was that I would have been helpless even untied. And not because of the gun, but because I couldn't stand up to a man like that. I hadn't even been able to stand up to my wife.

He sat on the couch facing me. He placed the gun on the armrest, crossed an ankle over his knee, and said, "It's convenient, you living out here in the boonies. Leslie Buchnolz, 10624 Vinemaple Trail. I looked you up in the phone book. Nobody saw me come here and nobody'll see me go. That makes it easy, but that's O.K. because I already did the hard part. The waiting. Five long years of it."

"You might as well be talking Greek," I said.

"Don't get your hopes up." With his index finger he stroked the shiny metal weapon. "Where do you think I was those five years?"

Believe it or not, by then I wasn't scared any more. Because I'd given up. What else could I do in that position? I wrote myself off, and when I did my fear left. How much could it hurt? One shot in the temple—I'd be dead before I knew it. I twisted my head to give him a target. "We're total strangers. I don't know where you were."

"Tell it to the marines, Buchnolz. I was in the joint. Up the river without a paddle. You know for what? Armed robbery. At least that's what I copped to. Sound familiar yet?"

"You're still talking Greek," I said.

He chuckled. "Sure I am. You know me now. There was only one thing that kept me going when I was rotting away in that cell, Buchnolz—the fact that a good woman was waiting for me on the outside. But when Carole wrote me that some shyster lawyer got her a divorce something in my brain blew like a bad tire. But it gave me another reason to hang on—to see that you got yours."

"So you looked up Leslie Buchnolz in the phone book."

"You got it, counselor. If you want to try some lawyer talk, suppose you tell me how to get Carole back when that crud you helped her marry killed them both in a car wreck. Suppose you tell me what I've got left to live for."

His fingertip stopped its obscene dance over the gun and his palm

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closed on the grip. "Suppose you tell me again how you and me are strangers."

He didn't expect an answer but I gave him one. "I lost my wife too," I said.

"That breaks my heart." He raised the gun.

"I want revenge as much as you do," I said. "She stepped on me. She kicked me into the mud. She spit on me and she walked out."

"Isn't that tough." He was aiming.

"Her name's Leslie Buchnolz."

He lowered his gun.

About an inch.

"It's simple," I said. "Leslie's a woman's name too. She ran over me like a tank. It wasn't marriage—it was slavery. I couldn't even have my own phone listing. So that's how the book has us—in her name. Leslie Buchnolz, Attorney at Law."

The gun came all the way down.

"It's my wife who got your wife a divorce," I said. "Not me. I never heard of you in my life. My name's Arthur Buchnolz and I write gardening articles for a living. If you call this living. Look anywhere in the house for ID if you need proof, Mister."

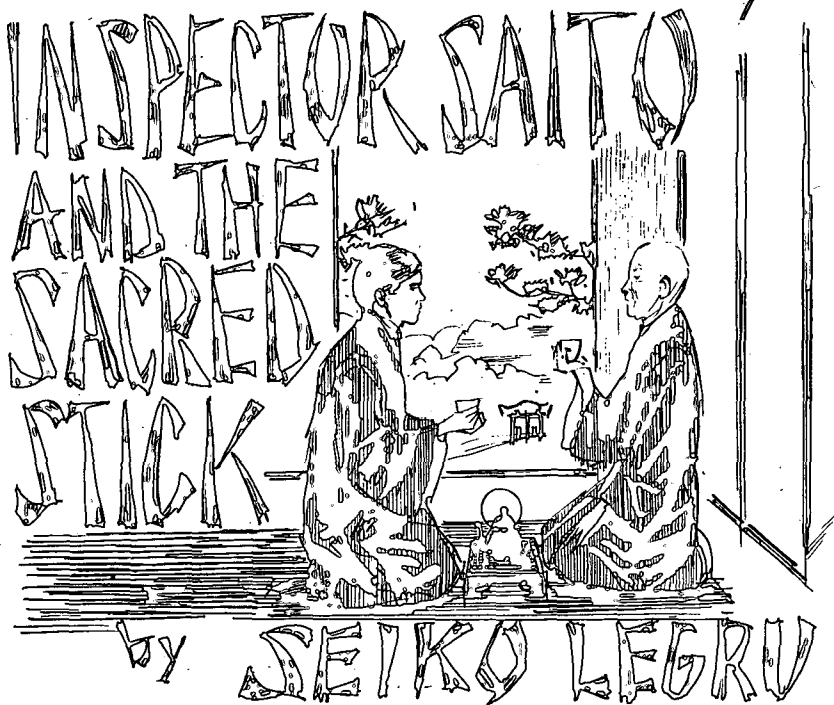
With my hands and feet tied I can barely move. I had to give him Leslie's new address—how could I resist with a gun at my head? He left the same way he must have come in, moving like a big jungle cat. I wish I could move like that. Because then I'd be able to wriggle across the floor a lot faster and find something in the kitchen to saw through this clothesline with. It must be forty minutes since he left.

But it just struck me—I should probably get myself to the telephone instead. Even trussed up like this I'll bet I can knock the receiver off the hook and get the operator to warn Leslie.

But maybe I was right to begin with and it would be quicker if I get myself untied first. I just don't know. I'll have to think about it. I wish I was more of a take-charge guy.

Leslie always wished that too.

Who would steal such a sacred object? . . .



It would be an exaggeration to say that Inspector Saito needed a rest—he didn't really, although he had recently solved a rather intricate murder—but Chief Inspector Ikemiya had somehow conceived the idea that his disturbingly brilliant assistant should take a few days off. A week, he suggested, or two weeks, and Saito had naturally declined to argue the matter. He didn't mind taking a holiday. Inspector Saito believed in few of the principal struts of Japanese society. He didn't, for instance, believe

INSPECTOR SAITO AND THE SACRED STICK

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that hard work produces merit. He didn't particularly dislike hard work either—not if it came his way, but he would never look for it. He had often thought he would like to do nothing at all and regretted the impossibility of such a choice. One always does something.

So that morning he took the bus to Shuyama, the little coastal village where his uncle lived. Uncle knew that the young inspector, his namesake, was coming, and had instructed his elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Oba, to make his favorite nephew welcome when he phoned. Old Saito didn't like to speak on the telephone himself, not any more. He had been an important businessman once, many years ago, before his luck turned and he lost nine-tenths of his fortune within a few days. With the one-tenth he retained Old Saito retired, claiming he would never be active again, that nine-tenths of all activity is wasted anyway.

There were certain similarities in the characters of uncle and nephew, recognized by both when misfortune touched the younger man's life too. When Young Saito lost both his parents in an automobile accident his uncle broke his exile in Shuyama to travel to the great temple city of Kyoto, Young Saito's home town.

Young Saito was still a student at the police academy when the accident tore at the foundation of his life but he regained his balance, helped, perhaps, by his uncle's quiet concern. He inherited his parents' fairly large house, and their savings and insurance added up to a tidy sum. Old Saito returned to Shuyama but he had become the young man's parent, and Saito spent his weekends and holidays with the old man.

Old Saito had never married, preferring to accept the services of the widow Oba. He paid her small wages and gave her a sense of security, and although Old Saito didn't supply much company, it was probably better for her than being alone.

So, for several years, the nephew reported to his uncle and the uncle inquired gently between reports. The uncle also dispensed occasional advice which, because of its subtle and interesting nature, was almost always followed by his nephew. Their relationship was close but unemonstrative. Young Saito liked to study and drink; Old Saito liked to meditate, work in his small garden, read, and occasionally drink. Young Saito liked to go out for walks; Old Saito hardly ever left the house. Old Saito was getting old—he was over seventy, and his health was poor. He had survived several heart attacks but each one left him weaker and less inclined to move from his garden or the four-mat room that overlooked

it. Mrs. Oba too was no longer young—she was past sixty. But her health was excellent.

Now Inspector Saito rode the bus, smiling vaguely. The landscape reminded him of an old Chinese painting, with small fields clinging together in irregular patterns, set off by mountains poking through low clouds. His suitcase contained books, paper, and his favorite brushes and inkstone. He intended to write an essay on crime motivation, to be published, he hoped, in the *Police Monthly*. He had also packed two scholarly kimonos and was looking forward to taking off his stiff dark suit and clinging necktie. This was going to be a very pleasant intermission in which he would detach himself completely from the usual routine.

He visualized the terrace of Shuyama's one and only restaurant, where he might eat an occasional meal or sip rice wine, ruminating and gazing at the sea. He grinned when he thought of the possibility of romance. Why not? He had found romance in Shuyama before. There wouldn't be any tourists this time of year, but there were a lot of women in Japan and some of them were both beautiful and available. All in all, the holiday would be a most welcome break from the grey and forbidding police headquarters in Kyoto and from the sordid crimes that had recently demanded his attention.

Murder, his specialty, was never beautiful, although it was often intriguing, giving the detective the chance to probe recesses usually hidden to the common observer. But right now Inspector Saito didn't want to experience the hellish spheres except on an academic and abstract level. Mostly he wanted to have a good time.

Oba-san opened the sliding front door and knelt, bowing. Young Saito bowed too. She formulated the polite phrases while he took off his shoes. She grabbed his suitcase when he stepped on the worn but spotless reed mats covering the corridor of his uncle's house. Young Saito had known Oba-san for ten years now, ever since the old man hired her, but he had never had much contact with the woman. He knew that she had lost her husband during the war and was childless. Oba-san's spirit was intelligent and developed, but she was also taciturn and sometimes even grumpy, behind smiles expressed with ugly teeth and tortured lips and between polite phrases. She knew the polite phrases, all seven thousand of them—she was a walking encyclopedia of polite phrases, the niceties that say nothing but smooth the atmosphere and leave the Japanese safely

enveloped in transparent cocoons.

"Has the Honorable Inspector-san had a good trip in the tiresome bus?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I am so pleased that the Honorable Inspector-san has deemed this house"—she couldn't say "unworthy house" as it belonged to her employer—"worthy of his visit."

"Uh-huh."

"I hope that the Honorable Inspector-san will accept the small upstairs room as his honorable abode."

And so forth. He walked on, bowing perfunctorily at the word flow behind him, and knelt and knocked on the door leading to the garden room. He could hear his uncle grunt and he slid the door open, got up, stepped through the door, knelt again, and closed it behind him. He bowed.

"Welcome," said Old Saito.

"Good of you to put me up again, Uncle-san. I hope I will not bother you too much with my untidy presence."

His uncle waved the apology away. "Unnecessary. This is your house. You didn't have to telephone either. I am always here and you are always welcome. Come closer and sit and smoke with me for a while. She will bring tea."

Young Saito shuffled forward on his knees, bowed again, and crossed his legs. He could feel the tension ease out of his body as his uncle pushed a tin of cigarettes across the smooth floor mat. He sighed happily and feasted his eyes on his uncle's bare skull, shining in the bright light coming in from the garden. It was a ridiculous thought, of course, but it occurred to him that his uncle resembled his garden. There was the same serenity.

The garden was small but landscaped perfectly, suggesting a forest—two gnarled pine trees; a lake—a small pond surrounded by rocks; immense vistas—some moss; and a crinkling path—six inches wide and of silver-grey gravel—that led away to the mountains—eight-foot-high elevations covering the back wall.

Old Saito, dressed in a faded blue kimono, sat erect, spine straight and head slightly bent. His round face was covered by webs of wrinkles and laugh lines, screwing up the eyes and the corners of his wide mouth, sensuous still because of the thick strong lips. But Old Saito was a quiet

man who knew how to restrain his joyful energy and the glint in his expressive eyes. He studied his nephew and nodded.

"You are well. That is good."

"And how are you, Uncle?"

"Well, but my body fails. It does not bother me much, however. I can still sit here and I can work in the garden sometimes. Oba-san has to help me now. She raked the path, you see? It is badly done."

Oba-san was in the room, giggling, kneeling with a tray holding a teapot and two cups.

"Only two cups, woman? Aren't you drinking with us? This is a celebration. The Honorable Inspector is so busy now that he can only give us his instruction from time to time."

She had the third cup in her sleeve and took it out and placed it on the tray, well away from the others. She poured the tea and they drank in silence, smiling at each other. Then Oba-san left and Young Saito rested his eyes on the garden. His uncle's quietness reached him and he felt his city thoughts ebb away as his mind floated along the path and lost itself in the mountains.

Half an hour passed.

The old man hadn't moved but Young Saito's back was suddenly aching. He got up and said he would go to his room to unpack. His uncle didn't reply. There was no need.

Young Saito had indeed come home. There was harmony in the house and he became part of its simple ways again, sharing his meals with the old man, acknowledging his few comments on small events, and spending a little time with him each evening in the bathroom where he poured hot water on his uncle's back and massaged his shoulder muscles.

He woke up early every morning and listened to the Buddhist sutras that his uncle sang in the garden room, a chant that might last a quarter of an hour, sung in Sanskrit in his uncle's thin high voice, lilting on the important syllables, accompanied by short, dry, but amazingly sonorous plock-plocks evoked by a little stick he hit against a wooden hand drum in the shape of a fish head. *Ha-ra-mi-ta shin-gyooooo*. The nephew didn't know what the words meant, but it didn't matter. They pervaded his mind, suggesting the great power that, as his uncle had explained to him at the time of his parents' death, is not beyond but within.

Saito always felt good when his uncle sang. He remembered one of the

conversations that had taken place during those strange days when his parents were suddenly gone and replaced by this old man he had hardly known until then.

"What is a sutra, Uncle?"

"A sutra goes beyond death, beyond birth, beyond illusion."

"There is no death, Uncle?"

His uncle did not reply.

"My parents aren't really dead, Uncle?"

"They are dead. They aren't here."

"You mean they are somewhere else?"

"No. Here or there—I don't mean that. The sutra goes further, much further."

"Do you understand, Uncle-san?"

"It is not a matter of understanding."

Old Saito wouldn't comfort his nephew. He wasn't that sort of man. But his chanting soothed the mind—then as now.

The holidays passed slowly and pleasantly. Young Saito slept, ate, read. He worked on his essay. He went for short walks and returned and rested in the little room upstairs. Every morning his uncle chanted the sutra, and the sound of his high old voice came through the garden, through the upstairs window.

Then one morning it didn't come.

Young Saito was washed and shaved, ready to go down to breakfast, but he was waiting for the chant, kneeling near the open window. Finally he went down and found his uncle and Oba-san already eating.

"You didn't chant, Uncle."

"I couldn't. The stick is missing. Without the drum I can't get the words right."

"The drumstick is missing?"

"Yes. It isn't there."

Young Saito sat, chopsticks halfway between his bowl and his mouth. His uncle grinned.

"Eat, the rice will get cold. Enjoy the stew. Oba-san spent an hour at the market yesterday selecting the right ingredients. She is very fussy when you stay here—when it is just me she is back in ten minutes."

Oba-san giggled and protested.

Young Saito ate and thought. The drumstick couldn't be missing. The fish-head drum and the stick—a thin little stick, thickening at the end

and wrapped in cloth—were a very valuable set that had been handed down in the Saito family for many generations. It rested on the altar in the garden room, always to the right of the Buddha statue. There was little furniture in the house and everything was meticulously kept by Oba-san. Nothing could disappear or be mislaid.

He put his chopsticks down and stared at his uncle. "The drumstick was stolen."

His uncle laughed.

"It's no laughing matter, Uncle. A theft is a crime. Some thefts don't matter much and constitute small crimes, but to steal an object that has more than material value—something that is used ritually every day, that is part of a ceremony, a holy ceremony—"

His uncle laughed again. "Don't carry on so, Nephew. A small stick leaves a small emptiness."

"A great crime," the Inspector said stubbornly. He picked up his chopsticks and jabbed at a slice of pickled radish, got it into his mouth, and chewed furiously. "Who would steal from your house?"

"Ah." His uncle got up and went to the garden. Young Saito got up and followed. His uncle was watering the moss from a dented can.

"Uncle?"

"Yes?"

"Who would steal from your house?"

"I don't know."

"But this is crazy, Uncle. Who would steal from your house and why would the thief take only the drumstick? Nothing else is missing, is there? I saw the drum."

"Everything is still there."

"Did you hear anything during the night?"

"No, but I sleep well, and I sleep in the other room, behind closed doors. There's traffic in the street, and I don't hear the traffic either. When I sleep I sleep."

"The drumstick was there last night?"

"Yes."

"It's crazy." Saito stumbled over a rock and his uncle grabbed his arm.

"Not crazy. You are a police officer, Nephew—maybe somebody has thought of a puzzle for you to solve. Perhaps this is something for you to do. Find the drumstick for your old uncle."

"I will, sir."

Young Saito went for a walk and stood on the beach watching the long waves come in. They came one after the other, quietly. He watched a heron gliding over the waves, a sharp silhouette moving gracefully. He found a large rock and sat against it, smoking.

A case, a criminal case, here in Shuyama of all places.

There would be other crimes in Shuyama perhaps, misdeeds that hadn't crossed his path. But local police officers could take care of those misdeeds—Saito had little to do with what went on in Shuyama.

With one small exception—a missing drumstick.

He sighed and concentrated.

First of all, he visualized his uncle standing in front of the altar in the garden room, ready to pick up the drum and the stick, a gesture he had been making for years. But there was no stick. His uncle would have looked around and then, probably, shuffled back to his bedroom. The old man, supremely disciplined and close to death, was strong enough not to care. No drumstick, no sutra chanting. But who would take it?

No, that was the wrong question. Anybody in Shuyama could have taken the stick. Japanese country houses aren't locked. Burglary is easy—all the burglar has to do is walk into the house. Anybody was suspect.

Who would have taken the drumstick of an old man, this particular old man? It was a valueless object. Together with the drum, it was worth something if sold to a collector, but the stick by itself? Nothing. So the thief wasn't acting out of greed. There had to be some other motivation.

He lit a second cigarette, took a puff, and watched it burn. He saw two possible motives. One was spite, and that was evil, truly evil. It meant somebody wanted to hurt the old man, disturb his peace of mind, destroy the spiritual exercise that evidently meant much to him. But his uncle had no enemies Saito knew of. Old Saito had retired long ago, and kept to himself. Perhaps the thief was acting on some deep hatred rooted in the past. There are minds that don't forget. If Old Saito had enemies of that kind only he would know. His nephew could ask him.

Motive two was that somebody was annoyed by the sound of his uncle's voice and the plock-plock of the drum at such an early hour. But the voice and the drum wouldn't carry very far. Only nearby neighbors could be disturbed by the sutra. Young Saito would check them out.

He got up and walked back, but strayed into the restaurant on the road skirting the beach. He sat on the terrace for a while and sipped tea.

He would have drunk rice wine but he had to keep his mind clear. There wasn't too much time. His holiday was almost over.

He went back to the house and found his uncle in the garden and squatted down next to him. The old man was weeding.

"Uncle?"

"Yes, Inspector-san—have you found the stick?"

"Not yet, sir. Do you have enemies, Uncle, enemies who hate you so much they would attempt to shatter the peace of your old age? I am sorry, but I must ask."

His uncle stopped weeding and smiled. "No, not any more. In business I made enemies, but I also made peace when I retired. I repaid my loans, everything that was due, and also those debts that weren't expressed in money." He studied a weed before dropping it into the bucket standing beside him on the moss. "Anyway, all those men are dead now. I attended their funerals."

"Thank you."

"Is that all you wanted to ask? Can I continue weeding now?"

"Yes."

Saito went into the house and sat in his upstairs room. His uncle's house was on the edge of the village. There were fields on one side, one house in the rear, and another a little way up the road. He would have to interrogate the people in the two houses. On the way downstairs he passed Oba-san.

"Will you be home for the unworthy lunch I am preparing, Honorable Inspector-san?"

He said he would be, and noticed the squeak in her voice. Oba-san had rather a pleasant voice normally, even when she giggled. Perhaps Oba-san was upset about the crime.

"Your honorable uncle says you are making an investigation."

"I am, Oba-san. Do you have any idea where I should look?"

Her eyelids fluttered and the squeak was more noticeable. She said she had no idea.

He stopped in the street, thinking about her. Why would Oba-san take the stick? Her behavior could indicate that she had. He had studied so many suspects he had learned to detect the signs. Oba-san could be lying. But what motive could she possibly have to hurt her employer—or to protect some third party who had taken the stick?

The house in the back was similar to his uncle's house and another old

man lived in it, a thin, tall old man with a squint and a stutter. Saito remembered having seen the man in the village and he had been told that he was a retired professor. Saito brought an excuse. He had been playing with a ball that morning and the ball had escaped from him and he wondered perhaps whether. . .

The professor and Saito looked for the ball. Meanwhile, Saito made conversation. Was the professor a Buddhist, by any chance? Did he ever chant sutras in the morning, like Saito's uncle?

The professor was a Buddhist but he didn't chant the sermons of Buddha. He liked listening to the chanting, however. They agreed that old Mr. Saito had a fine chanting voice.

— "Like a trained priest—very beautiful," the professor said. "I always listen in—from here, from my garden, or from the balcony when the weather is bad. It is a very fine experience, a good start to the day. But your uncle didn't chant this morning. He isn't ill, I hope?"

So there was nothing there. The professor was kind and polite. A retired scholar and gentleman—even his squint and his stutter were most dignified.

Saito visited the other house. A servant brought him to the lady of the house. He told his story about the missing ball again, and again they didn't find it. He managed to bring sutra-chanting into the conversation and the lady, a good-looking woman about forty years old, said she didn't belong to any particular faith but that she liked the sound of Old Saito's voice and drum, although she had no idea what the sutra meant.

"Do you hear my uncle every day?"

"Sometimes. But I often sleep late. I own the restaurant here, you see, and the work in the kitchen and the office is strenuous, so I sleep rather heavily."

The Inspector complimented the lady on her fine restaurant and regretted that he had never met her there.

She laughed. "I have no time to mingle with the guests, but please tell them who you are when you come again and I will have a specialty prepared. It will be an honor to entertain the nephew of my good neighbor."

He went back. Neither the professor nor the lovely lady would have burglarized his uncle's house. The very thought was preposterous.

So he had lunch with his uncle and Oba-san served them. Saito studied

the woman openly. She still showed signs of nervousness, and his original suspicion grew rapidly.

But why would Oba-san steal the stick? The theft was worse than bad, it was a sacrilege. To interfere with an old man's religious practice was no ordinary misdemeanor. His stomach was cramped with indignation and Saito smiled briefly. He was breaking an important rule of the game. A good inspector never became involved. He breathed deeply until the muscles relaxed, then he concentrated again. Oba-san would have a good reason to behave in such an evil fashion. He would have to find the reason.

His uncle's coughing fit made him look up.

"Are you all right?" Saito asked him.

"No. I think I should lie down for a while."

Oba-san came hurrying in from the kitchen. "Shall I call the doctor?"

"No. I'll take some cough syrup and rest."

Together they helped the old man to his bedroom and Saito finished his lunch alone. Oba-san brought the tea.

"Has the doctor seen my uncle recently?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"Another attack will kill him. The doctor told him so. And he will have another attack. He had two in the last six months. The next one may come any day."

"I see."

The nephew's thoughts became clearer and later in the afternoon, when his uncle had got up again, he found the courage to speak openly.

"Uncle, you may die."

The old man laughed softly. "I will, Nephew, and so will you. Death is the only certainty. It comes to all of us. It is good to keep that truth in mind."

The Inspector tried to smile. "I am sorry, Uncle, but I must continue this frank conversation. Please excuse me. I am young, I do not have the right words."

His uncle reached for the pack of cigarettes Saito had left on the mat. They were sitting opposite each other. A bird clung to a bush just outside the open doors and chirped.

"Words are never right, Nephew. Soon there will be no more words for me. I can feel the silence already."

"You will die soon, and Oba-san will be left alone. Have you made provisions for her? I believe she has very little money of her own."

Old Saito's eyes gleamed briefly. "She has no money at all and she is quite alone. And I have made no provisions for her. You are my only heir."

"I see, Uncle. Thank you."

He thought about his position for the rest of the day. He knew how much his uncle was worth—still a sizable sum, for he had lived on the income of his capital and never touched his investments. There would be far more than enough for Oba-san's needs. And it was true that he, his uncle's favorite nephew, was the only heir.

"Good," he said aloud and went down to speak to Oba-san in the kitchen.

He had some trouble finding the words. Oba-san said nothing and seemed uninterested. She busied herself washing a few dishes, drying them, and washing them again.

"You will be taken care of, Oba-san, I promise you. You will have a pension as long as you live. It will be paid monthly. I will be responsible. When my uncle goes I will still be around, but in case anything happens to me too I will see a lawyer and we will draw up a contract in your presence. You will be safe whatever happens. I am sorry to speak about such painful matters but I want your mind to be at ease and this house as it should be."

He stressed the last sentence and tried to look into her eyes, but the steam coming from the sink was rising between them.

When he went to bed that night he was sure he would hear his uncle chanting the sutra in the morning. The drumstick would be replaced on the altar during the night.

But there was no sutra in the morning.

"My drumstick is still missing," his uncle told Saito at breakfast. "Your progress is slow, Nephew. And yet you have been well trained. I remember the words of praise you received when you graduated, and I also remember the newspaper articles about murders you solved in Kyoto. And not only murders. I recall reading about a complicated case involving computers that had been programmed dishonestly. Even the experts of the computer firm were dazzled by your line of reasoning and your quick success. The article said you have an unusual mind, that you think from

strange but effective angles. But all I want is a simple drumstick and you have not found it."

"No, Uncle."

The Inspector spoke to Oba-san again. This time he didn't mention a pension.

"When my uncle dies his house will be yours, Oba-san. You can continue to live in Shuyama, where you have lived for so long now and know everybody." He thought for a while, watching her cut up an eggplant. "And his capital will be yours too. I don't need an inheritance. I have my own house and my own income and I can live without many possessions. I have a salary. My interests have never been very material. Don't worry, Oba-san, I am giving up nothing for your sake. I want you to be safe and happy, like my uncle wants you to be."

He felt fine after his little speech and went for a walk. True, Oba-san had made no reply, but then she never said much. The beach had been swept clean by the tide and he spotted a pair of small seagulls that glided over him and landed nearby, allowing him to observe their graceful bodies at leisure before they flew off again.

He had told Oba-san that he wouldn't be home for dinner and instead he had a meal at the restaurant, where he was served by the owner. She sent her best maid to have some rice wine with him on the terrace, and later he took the young woman home and stayed the night. When he came back to his uncle's house in the morning the drumstick was still missing.

His uncle called him out to the garden and they weeded together, pulling out small stalks of grass, careful not to damage the thick moss.

"Your investigation is not going well?"

"No, Uncle."

"Oba-san is worried about the drumstick. She talked to me about it this morning."

"It will come back, sir."

"Oh, yes. Another few days, perhaps. You will be leaving tomorrow. I would think I will have it again the day after tomorrow."

The Inspector grunted, then remembered his manners. "Yes, perhaps."

"It will come back without your help. I have only been teasing you."

Each man must make his own decisions. Oba-san has been very good to me. She has done no wrong. She has little choice. Finding a solution to her problem makes her suffer. Perhaps she cannot be helped."

"Yes, sir."

"But perhaps she can be helped. It is not for me to say."

The Inspector went for another long walk. He weighed this against that, that against this. Finally he made up his mind. Oba-san was scrubbing the bathroom floor when he came back. His uncle was asleep.

"When my uncle goes, you can come and stay with me in Kyoto, Oba-san. I have been in need of a housekeeper for some years now."

She looked up, blowing at the hair that hung in her eyes. "And when you marry, Inspector-san?"

"The house is big. You can have your own quarters. I do not plan to marry, but if I do there will be no interference."

He waited.

When she looked up again there were tears in her eyes. "Please do not mention contracts or lawyers again, Inspector-san. I am not in need of such papers. I serve the Saito family."

He knelt on the wet floor and touched her face briefly. "I am sorry, Oba-san." Then he got up and left.

The sutra chanting was pure and clear the next morning. His uncle hit the drum with more than his usual vigor. The last words, *makahanya-shingyooooo*, traveled far into the sky and melted with the sound of waves on the nearby beach.

The Inspector said goodbye after breakfast. His essay on crime motivation had not been finished, but he had perceived the thoughts in another mind and solved another case.

"I am sorry," Oba-san whispered as she walked him to the bus stop, carrying his suitcase. "Your uncle knew."

"Had you told him?"

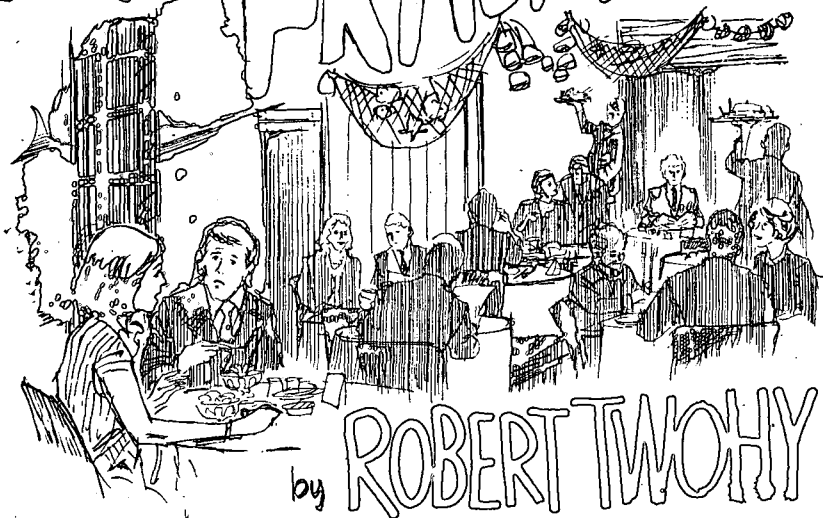
"No, but he always knows what goes on, and understands why. You will be very much like him when you grow older, Inspector."

The bus arrived and stopped. He took the suitcase and bowed to the old woman. "Don't be sorry, Oba-san. You did well, and your deed has been of use to me. Perhaps my work will improve now."

He sat in the back of the bus and waved to the diminishing figure at the stop. She was still bowing.

It was six months since Uncle Nort had disappeared . . .

DREAM FRAGMENTS



A busy restaurant at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. At a corner table a young couple sat—an ordinary young couple, decently dressed, nothing remarkable about either of them. She wasn't a beauty, but pretty enough; he was O.K. in an average way. They looked mid-America, and they were. They were Jim and Pollie Planz, from Kansas. They murmured about things and gazed around the restaurant.

They looked like tourists. They weren't, but they hadn't been long in

DREAM FRAGMENTS

the city. Jim was near the bottom of the ladder in a big corporation, and had recently been transferred here. They had a nice apartment on Russian Hill they paid too much for. They weren't yet accustomed to the freaks and crazies they saw everywhere and they alternated in mood between exhilaration and uneasiness—they felt worldly and callow at the same time, not yet part of but ready and eager to become part of the Big Scene by the Bay.

So here they were, on this April evening, tuning up for a big dinner on shrimp cocktails, when suddenly Pollie went rigid and her pretty lips separated into something close to a gawp.

Jim had a fleeting thought that maybe a shrimp had taken up residence in her throat and whispered anxiously, "Something the matter?"

"Uncle Nort!"

"What! Where?"

"There!" Nod of head, all dewy eyes.

He whipped his glance in that direction and saw six tables east a lean, white-haired man devoting full attention to a hunk of something once fished that a waiter had just set in front of him. It was Uncle Nort, all right; you couldn't mistake that sourball face, though his eyes, fixed on the hunk, had a kind of transported look, like a monk contemplating an illuminated manuscript. Uncle Nort always got that look when he sat down to good seafood; it was legend in the family, how much he loved seafood.

Jim whispered, "Well, I'll be golly-darned!"

Pollie hunched forward. "What'll we do?"

"Do?" Thoughts scurried through her husband's brain, but they had no substance; they were mere fleeting shadows, signifying nothing. "Do? Uh, well, we could, uh—tell the manager?"

"Tell him what?"

"To, uh, hmm. Maybe call the police?"

"What's Uncle Nort done? I mean, could we say he's done anything?"

"Well, he ran out on Aunt Nette. Broke her heart. Took a lot of money."

"But he left half the money."

"Yes. Well, we could, uh—I could talk to him."

A light shone through the dew in her eyes. "Would you do that?" she whispered. And she meant, not "I would like you to do that," but "Would you be so splendid as to do that?"

Jim knew that now he had to do it or be forever diminished. That was the price women exacted by those looks of adoration; they forced a man to take action on matters he wasn't all that hot about. Jim had been merely thumbing through notions of procedure proper to the occasion of coming suddenly on a long-lost relative in a fancy fish house 1500 miles from his point of disappearance. He hadn't really meant to *do* anything.

But now he was stuck with it. He got up, squared his shoulders, laid his napkin purposefully by his shrimp cocktail, stood a moment tall and fine, then turned and marched off in the direction of familial duty.

Six months before, Nortwick Fontaine had left a note on his wife's dresser, informing her that he had served out his time; he was taking half their joint account and leaving half, and she should use some of it to hire a kid to sweep the house now and then, since she lacked the brains for that task. He wished her all the happiness she had given *him* in 34 years of marriage, and assured her that immediately he got word of her demise he would return to Wichita and with extreme pleasure attend her final services, and when the grave was filled in he would give a solo dance performance. The car, the house, and all the stock certificates were now hers, and the insurance policy, with her as beneficiary, would remain in effect as long as she kept up the payments. That note was the last she had heard from him.

The lady was hurt and upset. She wept a good deal. It wasn't that she missed him—she missed the money he had filched from their joint account. More important in her thoughts was the insurance policy; only the day before his infamous departure she had completed arrangements with a man in nearby Hutchinson who was a problem solver of a sort. How she had heard of this man is another story, and a peculiar one. Enough to say here that she *had* heard of him, and contacted him, and together they had worked out a project that tied together two facts: Nortwick ritually took an early-morning jog through the dark quiet streets of Wichita, and the problem-solver owned a six-wheel truck.

This man's name was Ludovic Van Snyderhoff and, though small and stringy, he looked like a capable truck operator. Nette Fontaine had a merry dream that night, all about double indemnity.

Then next morning she found Nortwick's uncharitable note. She wept and thought it hateful of him to go flitting off blithe as a butterfly, as if he had no responsibility for her feelings. . .

Jim, now arrived at his uncle's table, knew nothing of his aunt's aborted project. He knew only that she cried a lot when he talked to her on the phone. And being a decent young man who took no pleasure in a woman's tears, he would do what he could to bring about a reconciliation.

His uncle looked up from his hunk and Jim gave him a smile as broad and charming as a cornfield in Kansas tickled and twirled by a vagrant breeze.

"Uncle Nort! Hi!"

His uncle's eyes had taken on their customary expression: mordancy.

Jim said, "I'm Jim Planz! I'm here with Pollie! We're living in San Francisco now!"

This information was received without comment.

"Gosh, it's been a long time since I've seen you!"

Finally Uncle Nort spoke, very low.

"Not long enough."

"What was that, Uncle Nort?"

"What was what?"

"I thought—well, it's sure great to see you."

Uncle Nort looked at him.

Jim thought it was silly just to stand there beaming, and something told him that if he asked to sit down the answer, if he got one, might be disconcerting; so without further preliminaries he sat down. He knew Pollie's eyes were fixed on him across the room, and having started something he wasn't going to slink away.

"What are you doing in San Francisco, Uncle Nort?"

"Eating dinner."

"How long have you been living here?"

"I don't *live* here—this is a restaurant, not a flophouse. I come here to eat."

"I mean in San Francisco. How long have you been living in San Francisco?"

Uncle Nort separated a wedge from the hunk and put it in his mouth.

"It's quite a city, isn't it?" Jim went on.

"Quite a city for what?"

"It's so different here. From Kansas."

"Away from this table it is."

"Pollie really finds it interesting. She's here with me. We're living here now."

"You said that."

Jim threw a quick glance toward Pollie. Her eyes were bright and intent. He took a deep breath. "I saw Aunt Nette a few months ago." His smile turned off; his open countenance got about as solemn as it could. His voice was low. "She really misses you."

"Who does?"

"Aunt Nette."

"You're spoiling my dinner."

Jim's solemnity continued. "I know things went wrong between you. Couples grow apart, misunderstandings develop—people have trouble expressing how they feel."

"Your aunt has trouble expressing anything that takes more than three words."

"Don't you ever think of the life you had together?"

"You always were a sap-head."

"I'm sorry that you—take a hostile attitude." Jim gazed at Uncle Nort searchingly. "Don't you ever—feel alone?"

"That's how I'd like to feel right now."

Jim got up. He said nothing, because there seemed nothing to say. He felt he had done all a good soldier could do under trying circumstances. He cast Uncle Nort a look of respectful sadness and went back to Pollie.

She said eagerly, "Is he going back to Aunt Nette?"

He shook his head.

"But you did all you could."

He nodded.

"Maybe when we get home, you should call Aunt Nette. Maybe if she came out here herself and talked to him the spark might come back."

He nodded gravely as he watched Uncle Nort take a bone from his plate and begin to suck it in a refined manner. "Yes. That's a good idea—I'll call her. I did all *I* could—maybe *she* can bring him to a sense of his responsibilities."

Two hours later, at the very moment Jim and Pollie got to their apartment, their aunt, Nette Fontaine, was perched on a chair at the table in the spacious living room of her home in a delightful suburb of Wichita, her small face bunched in a frown as she worked over a sheet of paper, jotting down and crossing out figures.

"\$21,000 cash," she muttered. "Plus \$80,000 stocks, plus maybe \$65,000

on the house, plus \$2,500 on the furnishings, plus \$1,800 on the car, then subtract \$20,000 for Mr. Van Snyderhoff, then add \$300,000 from the double indemnity. That comes to a total of—oh dear.” It came to a total of \$3,926,800, but that didn’t seem right. She thrust her shapely little nose closer to the paper, trying to spot where she had gone wrong. It was hard to keep figures with so many zeros in the proper columns. The zeros had a way of wandering. Still, it was nice to have a lot of them to work with. When she got it all put down right, she would know to a certainty if she had enough for a trip to the French coast, enough to rent a sweet little chalet there. What fun that would be!

Of course she had no thought of becoming a member of the Riviera set. That would be childish fantasy, and she was nothing if not grown-up about this. Certainly she would be in no position to invite Jackie and Carlo and Sophia and Roman to her chalet; it would be enough to meet them on the beach and at occasional parties, to chat with them and gradually establish friendship with them—and with the bright young men who were always around them by the score. Aunt Nette pushed back her chair, lifted her head, and gazed at the green plaster wall, and a tender smile curved her lips as the wall faded and she saw sea and sunshine and sparkling white sands, and the bronzed bodies of Beautiful People scattered about decoratively. Among them, she saw herself strolling, trailing light silvery laughter. The phone rang.

She rushed to the phone, seized it, and squeaked, “Hello?”

Unintelligible muffled sounds. “Oh dear,” she said plaintively, “I’m afraid it’s a bad connection. Operator dear? This is an important call—I wish to report a disorder in my hearing.”

Then she realized she was holding the mouthpiece to her ear. She reversed the phone and said brightly, “The trouble seems to have cleared. Hello? Who is this?”

“Is this Aunt Nette?”

“This is Nette Fontaine. Who is this?”

“This is Jim Planz, Aunt Nette.”

“What? Who? Oh. Yes.” She had numerous nephews and nieces. “How are you? It’s nice to hear your voice. How is Susan?”

“Pollie.”

“Pollie who?”

“Pollie—uh. Pollie and I were thinking of you, Aunt Nette, and thought we’d call.”

"Isn't that nice! I've been thinking of you too." She did her uttermost to remember which one he was. Oh, yes. He was the stooped one with something wrong with him—what was it? His foot, that was it. No, not his foot, his glands. They were abscessed. Or impacted. "How are your glands?"

"My glands? They're—fine, Aunt Nette."

"Isn't that splendid!" He must have had an operation. "Are they all fixed now?"

"They're fine."

"Operations are so therapeutic. I'm so glad you're going to be normal again!"

Her nephew, after a few moments of silence, said, "This is Jim Planz. I'm calling from San Francisco."

"Oh my God!" The words exploded from her in sudden agitation.

He said, "What?"

"Nothing, dear. Nothing at all. I just dropped a cigarette down my bosom. It's nothing—it's quite all right. So you're in San Francisco! Isn't that splendid! Do they still have the Golden State Bridge?"

"Golden Gate. I can see it from my window."

"I think it's such a stylish bridge. I visited San Francisco years ago—a mere baby—but I clearly remember the darling little cable car that carried us over the bridge on our way to Carmel. How are you, Jeff? It's nice of you to call."

"The reason I'm calling—"

"As if you need a reason!" She started a silvery laugh, but it turned into choking for no reason at all, and for quite a while she choked into the phone, thinking, It's nerves, I shouldn't try to make bright laughs when my nerves are tight, it turns into choking. And as Joel or whoever it was made worried noises, she finally got her breath back and panted, "I'm quite all right, dear. Just a mild convulsion. I was saying that I'm so glad to hear your voice and to know that everything's fine with you and Vinnie and all those wonderful children. Give each of them a kiss from their old Aunt Nette."

"Uh, Aunt Nette." The voice seemed uncertain.

"Are you sure your glands are fixed?" Was it his glands? "I hope you're not just telling me that to make me feel better."

"I'm calling because a little while ago, in a restaurant, Pollie and I saw Uncle Nort."

"Oh my God!"

"He asked about you. So Pollie and I were thinking—he seems to eat regularly at this restaurant, and if you came to San Francisco and saw him there, and talked, maybe seeing you and realizing that down underneath the two of you still have a strong bond . . ."

As he went on she had time to pull her wits together, and when she spoke her tone was orderly and solemn. "My dear child, my dear Judd—" "Jim."

"Yes. The point is that time takes its course. There are things that happen that when they happen they've happened, and one learns that time in its own way has a way of passing in such a way that there takes place a passage of time, which is perhaps the way it should be, because there may exist a larger design that we infinite mortals cannot fully distinguish."

There was silence. She felt she had expressed a profound thought in terms that had cut through to the heart of this young man. She went on, "I have wept for dear Nortwick, but as I say, time in its own way has a passway that . . . I long for his return but it must be as he sees it because only then . . . So tell me nothing about where he lives."

"I don't know where he lives, but he seems to be a regular at this restaurant, which is called—"

She squealed. "Tell me nothing about the restaurant! Nothing!" She had cut him off just in time. She breathed heavily, then went on in a serene tone, "I must not pursue Nortwick. I will wait, and maintain my love, until he sees it in his heart to return."

She heard a catch in her throat, and thought it was beautifully done.

The young man's voice said, "If that's the way you want it, Aunt Nette."

"It's the way it must be, dear boy."

"I—I admire you. You've changed."

"I have learned a great truth—how to detach with love. Goodbye, John, and thank you for calling—and do take care of your unfortunate disease."

She hung up and sat a moment, fingering her tiny chin. "I handled that quite well," she murmured. The last thing she wanted to be told was that Nortwick was a regular diner at Pasquale's Livornian Grotto at world-famous Fisherman's Wharf.

For two weeks she had known that—and also that he rented a small apartment on a level block on upper Sacramento Street near a

park—where, bright and early every morning when the fog wasn't too thick, he would take his regular constitutional jog, crossing the street to the park to do so.

About six weeks ago Mr. Van Snyderhoff had informed Nette Fontaine that a certain friend who might help them get their project back on the track had returned to the Hutchinson scene. This friend had made a reputation as a private investigator before being indicted for blackmail, extortion, and subornation; now out of jail, and officially defrocked, he was working part-time as a fry cook. But this, said Mr. Van Snyderhoff, made him no less skilled at his special talent—which was finding missing people. His name was Mr. Poxx. If she would like to talk to him . . .

Mr. Poxx, a gnomelike man with luminous eyes, arrived at her house. They talked. She gave him a photograph of Nortwick. Mr. Poxx asked, "Does he chase females?"

"He thinks females are overrated."

"Drink? Gamble?"

She shook her head.

"How about eating? Does he like Oriental food, Mexican food, Lithuanian food, Albanian food?"

"Seafood. He adores seafood. That's all he cares about. That and early-morning jogging."

Mr. Poxx nodded and stroked his damp nose meditatively. "Cape Cod, Boston, Minnesota, Oregon, New Orleans, San Francisco—I'll start in San Francisco." They had already discussed money arrangements and he had accepted a retainer. He made a gnomish scuttle toward the door.

Aunt Nette had doubts. "It's a big city. The population of San Francisco is over twelve million. How will you find Nortwick?"

Mr. Poxx gazed at her with his luminous eyes. "If he's there, not to worry." He scuttled out the door.

Several weeks passed. She sent expense checks to him at a post-office box in San Francisco, but heard nothing in return. She began to despair. She asked Mr. Van Snyderhoff, "Why doesn't he let me know anything?"

"He's too busy to write. He won't rest till he finds his man."

"Nortwick may not even *be* in San Francisco."

"If he isn't, Poxx will go elsewhere. He'll go everywhere. He won't rest. Once on a case he never rests."

More time passed. She thought all was lost. Then one morning, the doorbell rang, and Mr. Poxx stood there, clothes filthy, needing a shave, eyes not luminous but puffed and glazed. "I found him," he croaked.

His eyes closed and he fell forward on his face, fast asleep.

After he had lain on her hallway floor for 22 hours he got up and told her where Nortwick was living and what his jogging routine was.

She called Mr. Van Snyderhoff. He set about overhauling his truck for the trip to the Coast.

He had left a week ago. Leaving, he had told her, "I'll call you as soon as I can when the job's done."

So for the past four days she had been waiting for the phone to ring. Tonight it had rung, and it was San Francisco calling—but it had only been her nephew Jed.

But she had said just the right things to him, and stopped him giving further information; thus, when Nortwick was discovered flat on the pavement by the park on Sacramento Street no one, not even the most spiteful person, could claim that she had any way of knowing his whereabouts in a city she hadn't visited since she was a tiny lass riding the cable car across the shimmering Golden State Bridge to Carmel. No one could start any malicious gossip. And that was only fair—because she herself always tried to speak well of people.

She went to bed, thinking good thoughts, and dreamed of the sun and the sea and sparkling sands, and the good life ahead on the coast of France.

At ten o'clock the next morning, after a late breakfast, she was at the kitchen table, with coffee and the morning paper, which certainly did all it could to make the world sinister and confusing, when the phone rang.

She leaped up, spilling her coffee, bounced into the living room, and got the phone in correct position to her face. "Hello?"

The voice of Mr. Van Snyderhoff sounded heavy and dank. "At 6:00 A.M. Pacific Standard Time I'm waiting in my truck on Sacramento Street. Subject comes out of his apartment in his jogging gear. Starts across the street. I'm forty feet south of him—can't miss. I turn on the motor, rev up, pull away from the curb . . ."

His voice stopped. She squeaked eagerly, "Yes? Yes?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean, *nothing*?"

"Nothing. Motor dies. I'm out of gas."

"Out of gas?" Her voice quivered.

"Uh-huh. Gas gauge don't read right sometimes."

She had a feeling that fragments were tumbling around in her head—all she could see were the bright, tumbling fragments. Fragments of what? Dreams?

His voice came again: "Ten minutes goes by, I'm pushing the truck to a hill I can go down. Subject is running around in the park but stops now and then to watch me. Then a cop car pulls up. They cite me for blocking a residential street. They check the truck—no registration, though I had one once; bad taillight, which was O.K., I think, when I left Kansas; expired plates. They send for a check on me. They find I have sixty-six parking warrants back in Kansas."

She whispered, "Sixty-six?"

"That's what *they* say. It's some dumb bureaucratic error. I'm almost positive it's less than sixty."

Fragments of dreams—the sun, the shining shore, Jackie and Truman and Ava and Federico. Could dreams be put back together? "Maybe tomorrow morning? If you put in some gas?"

"Truck's impounded. And I'm on the lam."

"On the lam?"

"Uh-huh. I managed to kick one cop where it counts and ran around the other one—I move fast when I'm being closed in on. Now I'm hid out in a hotel in the Tenderloin. That's where you go in Frisco when you're on the lam. I'm going to Peru. Send me the \$20,000 to the same post-office box you used for Poxx."

She breathed hard, partly from outrage, partly to fight off dizziness. "I'll do no such thing! You're entitled to nothing!"

"It wasn't my fault—I got the truck in top shape except for that rotten gas gauge! And if you don't send the \$20,000 I won't be able to leave the country and they'll catch me. I got all those warrants against me and I kicked the cop; I'd like to get all that cleared off my record, so if they catch me I'll offer them a deal. I'll tell them what you and me had cooked up, and they'll kill the warrants and give me immunity because they always get a boot out of busting a big crime like Intent To Commit Murder."

"You'd tell on me?" she managed to peep.

"What choice have I got? If you send me the \$20,000 I'll skip the

country and everything will be O.K. I won't have to make a deal or tell anybody anything."

She thought of all the cash she owned—\$21,000. Twenty thousand had been their agreement, and at the time it had seemed equitable; but at the time she had figured on double indemnity. Now there would be no insurance money. "I'll send you \$10,000," she said dismally.

"No good. I have a lot of guys to pay off, and the way inflation is I'd be broke before I got to Peru. They'd dump me in the ocean."

She said wanly, "All right."

"Same P.O. box as Poxx."

"All right."

"Do it quick, 'cause they're hot on my trail."

She hung up and wandered around for a while, her feet dragging, her spirits with them. Then she saw the sheet of paper on the table with the figures on it, picked it up and looked at it, and then wadded it and let it drop to the floor.

She looked at the green wall behind the table where last night she had gazed at the sea and the shining sands and the gently steaming bodies. All it was now was a plain dumpy old plaster wall.

At that very moment (Pacific Standard Time) in Pasquale's Livornian Grotto at Fisherman's Wharf on the edge of delicately polluted San Francisco Bay, Nortwick Fontaine was about to take his first mouthful from a prime haunch of abalone that lay supine on the platter before him, sweetly awaiting ravishment, when into his mind flashed a vision.

He saw his wife Nette sitting at the table in the green living room in Wichita, head pillowed on her arms, weeping bitterly, with bright bits of something lying around her on the table.

He felt a pang he had never felt. Could it be remorse? Nette was bawling her heart out. He'd had no idea she loved him so much.

Was this a message to him to go back to her?

What were those bright bits lying around her, like scraps of gold or glittering tinsel?

He realized that the fork bearing the first bite of abalone was still poised in front of his lips. Then a sharp, clear voice sounded in his head. "Remember, Birdlegs, you can't go home again." Birdlegs was what his little playmates had called him as a child.

No, he mused, that's true. I've heard that. You *can't* go home again.

"Well, you *can*," said the voice, as one willing to consider alternatives. "It's been done. But *you'd* better not. Things are a lot healthier for you in San Francisco."

Healthier? This often foggy, damp, crowded city, crawling with all kinds of criminals and lunatics who would much rather slug you than give you a pleasant smile, most of the streets running straight up and down so that if you should stumble you'd keep bouncing and rolling for the next ten minutes and wind up in the bay or in shreds, half a mile away from your point-of-stumble? *This* city was healthier than the clean broad fields of Kansas?

"Yeah," the voice said matter-of-factly. "For *you*. Because even though she's broke now she'd come up with *some* screwball idea—and next time maybe it'd be screwy enough to work."

Nortwick didn't know what the hell the voice was talking about, but somehow he was sure the *voice* knew what it was talking about.

He put the bite of abalone in his mouth and tasted. It was the first note of a gorgeous symphony. "I was just kidding," he said to the voice. "I'm not going back."

"Sir?" said a passing waiter. "I didn't quite hear you. Is everything satisfactory?"

Nortwick gave him a smile so warm that the waiter became immediately paranoid. "Everything's sublime," Nortwick said. And that was how he felt.

The waiter managed a ghastly smirk and fled.

Nortwick proceeded to tuck away the rest of the symphony without any further thought to poor Nette, who slumped in the living room, her head bowed and weeping, surrounded by the bright fragments of her dreams.

The September issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale August 16.

The festival turned into a wild jamboree . . .

AMATTER OF KICKS

by LAWRENCE
TREAT and
RICHARD
PLOTZ



Nobody in his right mind would have taken Chief Dan Moorhead of Morgan County for a dancer. He was solid as a banquet table and plump as a mooring buoy. Still, like Zero Mostel, he was light enough on his feet to move with the best of them in an old-fashioned square dance, or a Yugoslav line dance, or a Scandinavian turning dance, or even a Bulgarian line dance with eleven-sixteenth rhythm and belt holds. So, quite naturally, he was at the international dance festival on the high-school

athletic field when it all happened.

There had been some drinking, and it ended up in a kind of wild jamboree where nobody bothered with partners but just picked whoever was nearest and went through the steps. But that shouldn't have been done with a Hopak, which is difficult to learn and has to be timed to a nicety. Otherwise the turns and jumps and kicks can get out of hand. As, apparently, they did.

Dan was making the most of that last, furious round. He did a squat-and-kick routine with a sturdy little girl whom he figured for a high-school cheerleader. Then, out of the semi-darkness of the athletic field, a tall Amazon with wide shoulders and a big floppy hat appeared. Somehow she pushed the bouncy little cheerleader aside and began dancing at Dan, and then with him.

She seemed to sense his rhythm and his timing, and then to challenge him to some kind of a contest, which he took up with a will. The fancier his step, the better she liked it. She had speed, grace, and balance. Slap your hips, then your ankles—wheel, turn, jump, hop, whirl me, spin me, and dance me. She seemed determined to prove she was as good as Dan, and maybe better.

Briefly, under the flapping hat, he caught a flash of eyes and a glimpse of parted lips in a shadowy oval face. Then, at the height of their dance, Dan heard a yell and saw a group standing at the edge of the ball field bending over something or someone.

Dan broke off at once. "Got to see," he said and left his mysterious partner.

He was certain she had no idea who he was, because here, at a festival like this, if anybody even bothered calling him by name, it was only Dan. From the two or three times he'd attended the series of summer folk dances, he recognized some of the regulars who showed up faithfully every week. But he had no idea what any of them did apart from folk dancing.

It was simply as Dan, then, rather than as the Morgan County Police Chief, that he strode over to the group surrounding the still figure of a man. Nevertheless, Dan conveyed the stamp of authority in manner and voice. He took charge at once and checked the man's vital signs, after which he looked up. "Someone had better get a doctor," he said.

A minute or so later a stocky man, broad in nose and lip, came rushing over. He stopped short when he recognized the man on the ground.

"It's Howard Lieb!" he exclaimed. "Howie—" He dropped to his knees, felt Howard's pulse, and put his ear to Howard's chest. Then he straightened up. "He's dead," he announced somberly, and shaking his head he gave his diagnosis. "A coronary. Not much doubt about that."

"What about the blood on his forehead?" Dan asked.

"He probably hit his forehead when he fell."

"He fell on his forehead?" Dan said.

The stocky man faced him, as well as a man can face someone a good eight inches taller. "I," he said, "am Dr. Amos Kolodny. Maybe you know more about this than I do."

"I wish I did," Dan said. "I'm Chief Moorhead, Morgan County Police. Would somebody put in a call to the Medical Examiner's office? Maybe the autopsy can pin this down, but right now—" He turned to the group clustered around. "How did this happen? Did anyone see?"

There were no clear answers. In the confusion, in the semi-darkness where you could barely recognize your best friend, no one remembered seeing Howard Lieb or even knew whether he'd been dancing.

Dan tried to get a few facts from the organizers of the festival, who turned out to be Dr. Kolodny and a couple named Spelt. Lily Spelt was a quick, dark little woman with a long high-bridged nose and a mouth that seemed constantly to be exploding into a smile. Whatever she said was preceded and followed by a smile, as if it somehow gave a point to her words. Her husband, Phil, had a shorter nose and a longer face, and he seemed to speak out of a perpetual gloom. He even spoke with the sepulchral tones of someone entering a funeral parlor.

"Everybody knew Howard," he announced sadly.

Lily smiled brightly. "He just wrote a book about folk dancing. He'd studied it all over the world."

"We gave him some photographs for the book," Phil said regretfully.

"I helped him with it too," Dr. Kolodny said. "A number of his friends did."

"He was an authority," Lily said. "Everybody respected him."

"Without him," Phil said mournfully, "we wouldn't have had the dance this evening."

"Why not?" Dan asked.

"The school didn't want us to use their field. But Howard managed to override their objections. He argued that folk dancing is not only an art, but excellent exercise and very good for the health."

"As the school physician and a member of the Board of Health," Kolodny said, "I backed him up."

"Did Lieb have a heart condition that you know of?" Dan asked.

"He came to see me some time ago," Kolodny said, "complaining of migraines."

"What did you do?"

"What I did," Kolodny said, "was strictly between doctor and patient. Not that I'd withhold anything—far from it—but in these days of malpractice suits, I've learned to keep my mouth shut. Let me just say I found nothing seriously wrong with him and advised him to consult a specialist."

"Did you recommend someone?" Dan asked.

"No, he said he had somebody in mind, and I let it go at that."

Flashing lights and the wail of a siren interrupted Dan's questioning, and he walked over to the ambulance and identified himself. "He's been certified as dead," he said, "by Dr. Kolodny over there. Check it out with him."

"We'll do that."

"But first let me have another look at the body under that spotlight of yours."

In the glare, Dan examined Lieb's forehead. He saw a bump and a small amount of blood that had receded, apparently from gravity, with the body on its back.

Later that evening, in the Right Side Bar & Grill where Dan was in the habit of meeting Willy Wharton, his counterpart across the state line, Dan outlined the case. Willy dwarfed Dan by at least half an inch, but lost out on pounds.

"It was a mess," Dan said. "With sixty or seventy people dancing, plenty of beer, poor light, and music that set you going—how the hell can you do more than guess what really happened? Maybe Lieb tripped, maybe he got a kick in the head or banged into somebody—it could have been anything."

"This dancing—is it strenuous?" asked Willy.

"Plenty. And a good folk dancer has to be something of an athlete. The timing can be tricky."

"You said something about Lieb maybe getting kicked," Willy said. "How hard a kick could somebody have given him?"

Dan slid out of the booth and called out to Maxie, behind the bar. "Maxie, have you got some good old-fashioned music in that juke box of yours?"

"Sure, Dan. How about an Irish jig?" the bartender called back.

"Fine. Just the thing to show Willy something."

Everybody who was at the Right Side Bar & Grill, so named because it was on the right side of the state line, where liquor taxes and prices were lower, would remember that evening. Dan Moorhead put on a show of stamp and clap and kick, and the kick hit the hook of a clothes rack and shot the whole works up to the ceiling. The consequent applause rattled the glasses behind the bar. Dan grinned and sat down.

"That," he told Willy, "is how hard a kick somebody could have given him."

Willy rubbed his nose, which was strong, high, and irregular. "Quite a kick," he said, "but it would take a powerful man to do it."

"I know a woman who could do it," Dan said. "I just don't know her name."

He got the autopsy report by phone the next morning. Although the M.E. couched it in the usual medical jargon, it boiled down to the fact that Howard Lieb had had a previous arterio-venous malformation, which is a lesion that can compress the surrounding brain tissue.

"A sharp impact could easily be fatal," said the M.E., "and as far as I can judge from the wound, it resulted from some kind of a blow. Not with a sharp instrument, although the skin was indented. There were no splinters in the wound, so the object was probably metal or plastic."

"Would the edge of a shoe do it?" Dan asked.

"Perhaps, although I'd guess the instrument was more rounded. Rounded, say, like a watch."

"How about the tip of a woman's shoe? Say a toe with a steel tip?"

"That would certainly do it, although I think the angle of impact would indicate a blow from the side."

"Thanks," Dan said, thinking that you could kick from the side if you were tall enough.

He assigned three men to the job of tracing Howard Lieb's movements during the twenty-four hours preceding his death. Meanwhile, he went back to the athletic field where the dancing had taken place.

He knew where Lieb had collapsed, but he had to guess where Lieb had been hit. He combed the area inch by inch, expecting nothing and

finding nothing, except what seemed to be a plastic watch crystal. It was a large one, a full inch and a half in diameter. He put it into a small cardboard box, labeled it for the state lab to examine, and sat down to think things out.

A wrist watch whipped on the end of its leather band? A blow of a wrist armed with the metal casing of a watch? A hard-toed shoe? Even, perhaps, a tap such as tap dancers wore? They were all possibilities. So who had a wrist watch with a missing crystal? And who had the kind of shoe he was looking for—and where was she?

He discussed the problem with Willy that evening, along with the rest of the day's findings. "Lieb had a CAT scan at Dundee Memorial Hospital the day before the festival, and the next day he was told he had an AV malformation," Dan said. "As far as I can find out, Lieb told nobody about the X-ray or its results."

"Don't go technical on me," Willy said. "What's an AV malformation? What's a CAT scan?"

"AV stands for arterio-venous. An arterio-venous malformation means his blood vessels were mixed up inside his head and were very fragile. I'm told a few people are born that way, and it usually never gives them any trouble beyond occasional migraines, which Lieb had. But a blow to the head could have caused this one to bleed into his brain. The M.E. says that's probably what killed him."

"Do you think Lieb knew about it?" asked Willy.

"Probably not. Chances are he'd never have known about the malformation except for the CAT scan. They're pretty rare. The CAT is a new kind of X-ray machine that can see things like AV malformations that older machines couldn't catch. The CATs are expensive, so you don't find many of them around. Lieb was lucky the hospital had one—that is, he would have been lucky if he'd lived. The M.E. says an operation could have cured him."

"But you still don't know whether his death was an accident?" Willy said.

"That's the trouble. Unless I find someone who knew about that vulnerable spot of his, I have no case."

"Better forget it," Willy said.

"The last dance number bothers me too," Dan said. "They had a nicely programmed group of dances, everything going fine, then all of a sudden

there was this free-for-all, with everybody going wild. I can't put my finger on who put the Hopak record on the machine. We'd played it earlier in the evening and we'd just had a Zweifacher, which is a combination pivot dance and waltz, ending up in three stamps. Then suddenly this second Hopak. Somebody must have planned it."

"Any idea who?"

"It's hard to tell. In the general confusion, anybody could have walked up to the phonograph, picked up the record he wanted, and put it on the turntable."

"What about a motive—if it is a homicide?"

"I don't know that either. But before I give up on this, there's somebody I have to talk to."

"Who?"

Dan shrugged. "I don't even know her name. For that matter, I hardly saw her face."

"You're nuts," Willy said.

If business had been brisk the next morning, Dan would have had to forget the whole Lieb business. An accidental kick was a perfectly reasonable hypothesis. He'd spent a whole day on a case that was no case at all, but it so happened that crime in Morgan County was in the doldrums. Nobody had been robbed or mugged, no drunks had been driving cars, no teenagers had failed to make a turn. Dan could have taken the morning off, but instead he went hunting shoemakers.

There were none listed in the yellow pages. These days, when shoe fashions change every season, you throw out the old and buy the new—who bothers repairing a shoe that's out of style? Still, there were a couple of repair shops in Morganville, and they told him of a place in Bullock and one in Red Hill. Steel toes were common enough, though the shoemakers Dan spoke to didn't know of any tap dancers and one wasn't entirely sure what a tap dancer was. Dan showed him in a two-minute performance that shook the walls of the shop and knocked an ashtray off the counter.

After that, slightly out of breath and realizing that the cobbler shops weren't likely to solve his problem, he decided to have a look at Lieb's apartment.

It was on the ground floor of a two-family house on the outskirts of Morganville. Scouting it from the outside, Dan found a screen that had been slashed and left on the ground just below a broken window. Be-

tween that and the shards of glass lying on the carpet inside, it was pretty obvious that somebody had raised the window, climbed inside, and lowered the sash. Dan, expecting to follow the same procedure, found he was too big to squeeze through the window without cutting himself on the jagged glass.

Frustrated, he rang the bell to the upstairs apartment. His identification got him nothing but antagonism, and it took a shouting match with a rather deaf but determined woman to convince her that he had a right to the key to the downstairs apartment, and that he had no evil designs on her person.

She opened the door grudgingly and Dan stepped inside. With the door still open he said, loud enough for anyone in the apartment to hear but too low for the deaf woman to catch, "Never mind, I won't go in after all." And, without leaving, he slammed the door shut.

Both the idea and its execution were fine. He figured it would smoke out anybody who still happened to be in the apartment, but he didn't figure on the dog.

A small, playful edition of a Welsh terrier came scampering down the corridor and jumped up on Dan in a spasm of sheer happiness. Automatically Dan said, "Down!" The dog obeyed.

Lieb's dog? Probably. But if anyone was still here, Dan had given away his presence. He walked forward cautiously.

The small desk in the corner of the living room had been ransacked. The drawers were open and papers were strewn among the pieces of glass from the broken window.

Dan picked up a couple of sheets of paper and examined them. Bills. A carbon of a letter to a dance group in France. A playbill from Los Angeles. A letter from his publisher concerning Lieb's book.

The dog had disappeared, but Dan found it in the kitchen lapping at a newly filled dish of dog food. The kitchen was a large one, with two doors in addition to the entry through which Dan had come. The back door and, he assumed, a pantry door.

He walked over to the latter and opened it, but ducked fast as a can whammed past him. A jar of pickles followed. It smashed against a chair, and a tornado in black erupted from the pantry. Dan hooked the charging figure with one swoop of his arm, but he reeled back under the slap-and-scratch attack that ripped a couple of buttons off his shirt and dug into his neck. Then he grabbed her arm and twisted, and Lily Spelt screamed.

"Let me go!" she yelled. "You're hurting me—let me go!" She bared her teeth in what more or less resembled a grin. When Dan eased up, the grin became the artificial smile with which Lily punctuated every other sentence.

"Police," Dan said. "Remember me?"

"You assaulted me! You have no right to use force!" She smiled again. Whereupon the dog, which had been running around madly and yapping mostly for the fun of it, sat down and proceeded to the business of straight uninterrupted barking. Dan took Lily by the arm and towed her into the living room.

"Sit down," he ordered, pointing to a chair, "and tell me what you're doing here."

"I want my manuscript."

"What manuscript?"

"The one Howard stole. I sent him an article on Swedish folk dancing and he published it under his own name. He stole it. I'm going to sue and I need the original manuscript—with my handwriting—to prove it was mine."

"So you broke in and went through his things and took what?"

"Just the manuscript and some photographs."

"Larceny. Breaking and entering."

"I came to feed the dog," she said, smiling. "I didn't want it to starve, and while I happened to be here I looked for the manuscript."

"Lieb's dog?" Dan said.

"Yes. I was worried about him."

"Breaking and entering," Dan said again.

"You wouldn't really, would you? Everybody would be on my side. Everybody hated Howie. He stole articles and pictures and used them as if they were his."

"Where's your wrist watch?" Dan said.

She reached into the pocket of her slacks and took out a small square watch. "Here. I took it off when I broke the window. Why?"

"Lily," Dan said, "do you think anybody hated Howard Lieb enough to have murdered him?"

"Murder?" she said, and whatever surprise or fear she had was covered up by her grin. "Everybody would have loved to murder him. He was overbearing, egotistical, and conscienceless. He stole every single article in his book."

"When I spoke to you at the dance festival, you were full of praise for him."

"Would I stand there in front of a dead man and say I hated him?" She looked toward the kitchen where the dog was still barking. "I'd like to take the dog home with me and take care of it."

"Go ahead," Dan said. "At least it should keep you out of trouble for a while."

Dan figured he'd spend the rest of the day checking jewelers, but he only got as far as the first one because as he entered the store, a customer turned around and they recognized each other.

In the daylight, her hair was golden, her face was polished perfection, and her eyes were blue and clear. She was wearing her floppy hat, and she was buying a new crystal for her wrist watch.

"It must have come off the other night when I was dancing," she said, holding up her watch. It was round, and large for a woman's.

Dan told Willy about it. "It was murder after all," Dan said. "And pure luck that I was right there when it happened. But it's over and done with now, wrapped up with airtight evidence and a full confession. Even the D.A. seems satisfied."

"What was the motive?" Willy said.

"He swiped a lot of people's articles and a lot of people had that motive. Lieb wasn't the great expert on folk dancing he pretended to be. Every single piece in that book of his had been given to him with the understanding that he'd pay and credit the contributors, only he never did."

"So that's why Lily Spelt killed him?" Willy said.

"You're way ahead of me," Dan said. "Lily Spelt didn't break the case. It was a woman named Sandra Jorgensen. I call her Sandy. Her folks come from Sweden, which is why she's so blonde."

"Sounds romantic," Willy said drily. "You were saying?"

"Last week Sandy discovered Lieb had stolen her article, so she phoned him long distance and demanded payment. When he put her off, she came to Morganville to collect. She had trouble getting in touch with him, so she came to the festival to have it out with him.

"She's a strong girl, Willy, and a talented folk dancer. She *could* have kicked him in the forehead and killed him. But when she saw him on the ball field and started over to speak to him, something came over

her—the idea that she could come so close to killing him was too much for her—and she fainted dead away. When she came to, Amos Kolodny was leaning over her, examining her. He took her pulse and listened to her heart with his stethoscope. And that did it.”

“Did what?”

“Gave me my case. I was there when he examined Lieb, and I remember that Kolodny hadn’t used a stethoscope. That told me. That and his fast diagnosis when he said it was a coronary, right off, just like that.

“It got me thinking, Willy. The plastic cover on the stethoscope head is about an inch and a half in diameter, just like the cover of a watch. Suppose he swung the metal head by the rubber tube that holds it? With that leverage, if you hit a lesion such as Lieb had, the blow could be fatal, and Kolodny knew it.

“I’d already sent that plastic cover up to the lab. They found a fleck of blood on it, and the type matched Lieb’s. When I went to see Kolodny and found he had a stethoscope with a missing cover for the head and with what looked like a shred of skin caught on the serrated inside edge, I had him cold. He broke down and confessed.”

“I guess he knew about that whatever-you-call-it,” Willy said.

“The malformation. Right. He’d examined Lieb a couple of months ago and he could hear the blood rushing through the area when he listened to Lieb’s head—with the same stethoscope he later used to kill him.

“From then on, Kolodny thought often about how easy it would be to kill Lieb with a blow to the forehead, and how it would seem like an accident. Then, the other night, the big chance came. Kolodny happened to be alone with Lieb for a few seconds, out of sight of the crowd. Lieb made some crack about what a lousy article Kolodny had written and Kolodny got sore. He tore the stethoscope out of his pocket and whammed Lieb on the forehead. Lieb kind of staggered and Kolodny walked away, but Lieb didn’t collapse until ten or fifteen minutes later.”

“What about the girl?” asked Willy.

“Her? Best Hopaker I ever came across, and she went back to Minnesota—to her husband.” Dan heaved the sigh of a man who has lost his all.

It was all acted out after a lively performance of Sweeney Todd . . .

IS THERE A KILLER IN THE HOUSE?

by **WILLIAM
BANKIER**



It was going to be one of those days at the Seafront Bar and Grill. From inside came the crash of bottles being dropped and at his position in the open doorway where he was working a squeegee over wet glass, Dexter Styles grinned to himself. He still could not believe his luck. Even after more than a year, he couldn't believe he had found such a painless way to make a living.

"That's right, Timothy, break the lot." Sarah Gibson's voice sounded

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calm and amiable. She always took it upon herself to discipline her young brother. Not that he needed much talking to—Timmy was good as gold, so eager to please that Dexter, with a writer's tendency to look beneath the surface, had to wonder when, if ever, the young bartender's seamy side would appear.

Gary Gibson spoke from behind the food counter where he was setting out sausage rolls and pork pies and French bread and salads for the luncheon trade. Dexter could just make out Gary's bearded face looking narrow-eyed and Mediterranean behind the glass shelves. "When you've set up your bar, Timmy," he said, "you might want to go up on stage and take a hammer to the barber chair. The pivot started to give way last night. If it gets any worse, I'll have no way to dump my corpses."

Dexter Styles soaked his sponge in a bucket of soapy water, wrung it out, and began washing the glass face of the easel sign by the front door. The black letters on yellow came clean.

Tonight at 8:30

The Poor Players in the classic melodrama
Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
Come and hiss the villain!

England's crazy drinking hours had their good side, Dexter thought as he finished his work. Back in Montreal at ten o'clock on a summer morning people would be in having toast and coffee, some already on their first beer. Here, the place couldn't open till after eleven, so there was time to organize, to polish brass and oak, to spread bread and carve cheese. It was like preparing for the curtain on opening night.

Dexter left his bucket on the promenade and walked across the shingle toward the water, his shoes sinking between loose stones. The folding canvas chairs were set out in numbers, with tourists and locals enjoying the misty sunshine. Dexter stood on a ridge where yesterday's waves had piled the pebbles as steeply as if they had been ploughed. The tide was out this morning, the flat sea lurking at a distance beyond a glistening plain marked with ribbons of wet, rubbery weed.

He turned his back to the water and looked at the row of hotels on the other side of the Parade, busy now with traffic. The buildings somehow managed to look decrepit and yet indestructible at the same time. They're like man himself, he thought—a shambles, but here to stay. Beyond the

hotels, entrenched on rising ground, was the city of Brighton, its streets thronged with visitors, many of its permanent residents departed on fast trains to London where there were good livings to be earned.

But it was not essential to go to London, Dexter Styles reminded himself. You could reverse the process, leave the big city behind and do very nicely down on the south coast. Here they were—a busted cop and his wife and her young brother; a part-time schoolteacher; a railway ticket agent; a beautiful rock-band groupie; and himself, an expatriate Canadian with a talent for writing flowery romantic fiction. And what had they in common? Simply the desire to appear on stage which had seen them gradually come together back in Wimbledon as members of an amateur dramatic society.

Whose idea had it been for them to sell what property they owned, to cash in insurance policies, close savings accounts, borrow from friends and parents in order to buy this failing restaurant hidden between arcades and public lavatories on the Brighton seafront promenade? And what inspired madness had driven them to reestablish themselves in a semi-communal life which hadn't a chance in a hundred of succeeding but which, like the buildings above and beyond the Parade, seemed ready to totter on into history?

Melody Britain appeared on her motorbike, putting along the promenade, tanned legs gleaming in the sun, oceans of honey hair cascading across her shoulders. Drowning in this spectacular flood was the smiling face of Clive Mendenhall, seated on the pillion, his arms around Melody's waist in what Dexter considered an unnecessarily firm embrace.

As Melody chained the bike against a standpipe, Mendenhall spotted his colleague and called across open space, "Standing guard against the Kraken?"

"Very nice for some!" Melody shouted. "I have to wait on tables."

Much of the trade at the Seafront Bar and Grill was repeat business based on a first sighting of Melody Britain, just as a good deal of the attention and applause during the nightly performances of *Sweeney Todd* was directed at the glamorous ingenue. Pop music's loss was Brighton's gain when Melody decided to stop following the Hasty Pud band in order to join the Poor Players.

"Who do you think washed all the glass and polished all the brass?" Dexter asked as he crunched awkwardly toward them across the shingle.

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Mendenhall made a show of inspecting surfaces. "Streaky," he said. "Obviously done by a colonial."

"I'm glad you were never my schoolteacher," Dexter said. "Pick pick pick."

Inside the restaurant, Dexter carried his bucket of dirty water to the men's loo and spilled it down a drain. He came back out and stood watching Melody set tables. Gary Gibson said, "Somebody has to go to the bank—if you're not doing anything, Dexter." Gibson's voice still carried traces of the authority he used to exert as a London policeman.

"I'm always doing something," Dexter said as he walked to the end of the bar where a grey cash bag and a deposit book sat beside the register. "My mind is forever formulating character and situation. Don't laugh. Without the income from my novels, where could the Poor Players borrow money for curtains and scenery?"

"At an exorbitant rate of interest," Sarah said. Her angel face frowned sweetly at Dexter from beneath the center part in her braided chestnut hair.

"Interest only happens if you make payments," Dexter complained, "which this company never does."

"Never mind," Clive Mendenhall said. "We'll put another star beside your name on the front blackboard."

A very tall man came through the doorway dressed in the sober blue uniform of British Rail. "Hello, Maxwell," Gary said. "I didn't expect you till this afternoon."

"My shift was changed. I'm off today and tomorrow," Maxwell Reddy said. He took off his cap, exposing a startling fuzz of orange hair. "I thought I'd come and help Timmy tend bar."

"Maxwell," Dexter said, "you used to sing in church choirs, didn't you?"

"For years and years."

"I need a quotation for a story I'm writing. I know it's from the hymn, 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling' and it's something to do with 'pure and spotless'."

Maxwell Reddy's pale-blue eyes went glassy. He lifted a finger and pointed at a spot in the air. "That's hymn 470 on page 465 of the hymn book," he said. "Verse 5. 'Finish then thy new creation, Pure and spotless let it be.'"

"Fabulous," Dexter said, scribbling a note. "I like a man with a pho-

tographic memory." He collected the cash bag and deposit book. "Now I'm off to the bank."

Outside on the promenade, Dexter almost ran into a blocky man in a tweed jacket. Afflicted with a long, narrow head and a sharp nose, he had made matters worse by putting on a pair of thin rimless glasses. Through these he was peering at the sign advertising the evening performance.

"Tell me," he said in a demanding voice; as if Dexter had come running to serve him, "at what time does the play end this evening?"

"It depends on audience participation," Dexter said. "If they're quiet we finish by ten-thirty. If they take part, we just run on and on." Then Dexter headed for the bank, looking back to see the pencil-headed man staring into the Seafront Bar and Grill like a cat inspecting a new hole full of potential danger.

The audience at the Seafront that night was large and vocal. They crowded the tables in the rectangular area facing the raised stage, the long bar manned by Timmy Callaghan and Maxwell Reddy on their left, the washrooms on their right, both doorways surrounded by framed photographs of the Poor Players in various productions. Behind them, past the entrance, curious promenaders stopped and peered in while out of the darkness came the thud and hiss of waves rearranging the shingle.

Gary Gibson, in the role of Sweeney Todd, was in his element. By the second act the customers had eaten their dinners and consumed enough booze to be fully in the spirit of the occasion. As another potential victim took his place in the barber chair, they cried out warnings and told the Demon Barber exactly what they thought of his behavior. Gary was so deeply into his ad-lib quarrel with the hecklers that the script was lost. Not that it mattered. The Poor Players were like a family—they could wing any scene and come out together at the end.

Dexter Styles and Sarah Gibson were serving drinks now that they had finished their roles on stage. Clive Mendenhall was in the barber chair, soon to be carved by Sweeney's razor and tipped down the chute into the cellar below. Melody Britain was on for her third entrance, her part having been enlarged by Dexter in response to popular demand. The crowd was whistling, the drinks and the cash were flowing across the bar. It was a raucous, steamy, heavenly night in the Seafront Bar and Grill.

Dexter saw the pencil-headed man some time after ten-thirty as the play was drawing to a close. He was sitting on a stool at the end of the bar and, as Dexter whispered an order for three pints of best bitter, his glance met the visitor's for less than a second. It was strange—all eyes in the place were creased with laughter. But this blocky little chap could not be said to have entered into the mood.

Curtain down. Mad applause and cheering. Curtain up. Everybody on stage for theatrical bows. Curtain down. Up. The principals back—hero, villain. Then Melody Britain returned for a torrent of appreciation that had little to do with her ability as an actress. Curtain. Lights. Waiter!

Last orders had been called and the players were all busy serving drinks when the pencil-headed man went mad. His commanding voice rang out from the end of the bar and the rest of the crowd fell silent.

"It was a ten! I gave you ten pounds and you've given me change from a one."

Timmy Callaghan's face was pink with embarrassment. "Sir, it was a one. I'm very careful about—"

"You're a liar! I won't be cheated. I want my money! You probably make a fortune out of the people you rob in here. Well, you won't rob me!"

Gary Gibson and Sarah had arrived. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"This young thief—"

"Let's not call anybody a thief—"

"He's stolen nine pounds from me. I call that thieving. And he's a liar as well."

Sarah whispered, "Give him the money. Get him out of here."

"No," Gary said to her. "That's as good as admitting we robbed him. I think he's trying it on."

"Do you?" the little man exploded. "We'll see what the police have to say about that."

A customer along the bar had heard enough. "Mister, why don't you cool it?" He was a big American lad in a New York Yankees T-shirt. "Even if the kid made a mistake there's no need to call anybody a thief."

"You shut your mouth and mind your own business!" Spit flew from the little man's lips and the American wiped his face.

"It's my business," he said, "when you start dumping on people so loud I can't ignore it."

Clive Mendenhall moved in and tried to draw the pencil-headed man

away but he pulled loose and advanced on the American. "What are you—his accomplice? I'm no fool. He cheats me and then you step in and try to scare me off."

"You creep. I ought to—"

As the American stood, the little man picked up half a glass of beer and threw it into the tourist's face. Then he flung the glass at Timmy Callaghan, who ducked as it shattered against solid oak.

Clive and Gary each managed to take an arm and together they propelled the enraged customer through the front doorway onto the promenade. It was their intention to talk to him, hear him out, cool him off, but he was not listening. As he strode away, he said, "I intend to find a policeman. You won't get away with this. I'll be back!"

He was as good as his word. The crowd had thinned by half when he reappeared with a uniformed officer at his side. The constable knew the Poor Players as local citizens and displayed a certain amount of sympathy, but he listened respectfully to pencil-head's recital.

At the end, the constable said, "A mistake can be made on either side, sir. Surely you'll agree."

"I made no mistake. This person cheated me and then he lied. He's still lying." He looked around. "And the other one, the accomplice—you'll notice he's conveniently disappeared."

Sarah took a deep breath. "He simply went away. You're lucky he didn't stay and charge you for throwing that drink."

It took a long time to deal with such persistent hostility. The little man wanted not only his money but an apology. At one point Timmy Callaghan lost control. He came out from behind the bar and had to be restrained.

"He keeps calling me a liar!" he shouted. "I've had enough of that. I never lie!"

Something about the bartender's physical outburst seemed to satisfy the little man. He became quieter. He changed from outraged customer to timid victim. He ignored the policeman's query as to whether he wanted to make a charge and disappeared into the night. The constable stayed long enough to have a clandestine vodka, then went on his way.

"What was that all about?" Melody Britain asked as the cast set about cleaning up.

"Paranoia," Dexter said. "In any case, it's all over."

He was wrong on both counts, as it turned out. ...

The little man's dead body was noticed lying under the pier by an early-morning stroller shortly after seven o'clock. He had been battered about the head with a slab of rock. The blood-stained weapon was found on the shingle a few yards away from the corpse.

What had been an idyllic existence for Dexter Styles and the rest of the players now became depressing. The innocent joy was all chased out of it. Styles was reminded of the way heavy clouds, like battle cruisers, could appear suddenly on the channel horizon and come lumbering in to terrify all of Brighton with a threat of something far more dangerous than mere thunder and rain.

The police had no choice but to consider Timmy Callaghan a suspect in the murder of the man—whose name, it emerged, was Norton Carr. So a broadbacked farmer of a man in a tweed suit and matching hat with the brim turned down came into the Seafront Bar and Grill that afternoon, lifting his spongy brown boots as if he was walking through compost. He was Inspector Harpdeck, and he wanted to hear about last night's argument.

It all had to come out—the accusation, Timmy's denials, and eventually his furious rounding on the deceased. Yes, he had to admit it, if the others had not stopped him he would surely have taken at least one good punch at Mr. Carr.

"That's all it required in the end," Inspector Harpdeck mused. "One punch with rock in hand—the medical officer tells me the others were superfluous."

Dexter stepped in with a reference to the American tourist. "Don't forget him—he's a suspect too," he said, describing the drink thrown in the face. "And he left not long after Carr did. He could easily have bushwhacked him down by the pier."

Harpdeck placed a description of the missing American in his notebook, writing painstakingly at the end of the bar where Maxwell Reddy was washing up glasses. As he wrote, a dark-eyed woman of indeterminate age came into the restaurant. She wore her black hair in a flamboyant fall across one shoulder and her costume was insistently gypsy. She was Eva Montenegro, the world-famous clairvoyant—or so said the sign in carnival-style lettering on the wall of her gingerbread house a hundred yards along the promenade.

"They told me the policeman is here," she said. "I have something to say."

When Eva Montenegro spoke, everybody listened. Inspector Harpdeck turned the page of his notebook and focused his eyes on the exotic woman taking her place on the stool beside him. The Poor Players formed a tableau on the periphery of this interesting confrontation.

"I saw the victim's photo in the paper this afternoon," Eva explained. "I realized I had seen him before. He came to me yesterday and I told his fortune."

"What can you tell me about him?" the Inspector asked.

"I'm not sure. Only impressions. He was tense; he seemed determined. It was as if he had some great weight on his mind." The fortune teller displayed an elegant profile as she looked back into the past. "I interviewed many soldiers during the war, some about to enter battle. They were the same—poised."

Dexter wanted to ask which war and whose soldiers. He remained silent.

"I've spoken to the deceased's brother in London," Harpdeck said. "I telephoned him an hour ago. He told me Norton Carr was a highly strung man and that the outburst in the restaurant was typical. Only a suspicion of unfair treatment would be needed to set him off."

"There was one thing," Eva Montenegro said. "I noticed as I read his palm that his fingernails were caked with paint, the colors an artist uses. It gave me the clue I needed to lead my predictions into the field of the arts. And I was right. He was surprised and pleased."

Harpdeck made another note, asked a few further questions, then closed his book and departed the Seafront Bar and Grill, advising Timmy Callaghan not to leave town. As the fortune teller prepared to follow him, Dexter Styles spoke to her.

"I'm curious, Eva," he said. "What sort of future did you predict for Norton Carr?"

"What else?" Eva Montenegro said. "Long life and prosperity."

The atmosphere during the performance of *Sweeney Todd* that evening was subdued. The uneasy mood of the performers came across to the audience, who watched the lunatic farce as if they were being given Eugene O'Neill. It meant an early closing as the customers drank up quickly after the final curtain and hurried away into a persistent drizzle. But one man remained—Inspector Harpdeck, seated alone at a table near the door.

While the closing-down ritual went on, Dexter took the opportunity to speak to the investigating officer. "You needn't worry," he said. "Timmy Callaghan isn't going to run away."

Harpdeck smiled. "He'd better not, or I might think he's guilty."

"You think he's innocent? So do we. Then the American tourist—?"

"Not necessarily. It might be any one of the crowd who saw the argument and resented Carr's manner. His brother Stephen told me he was easy to dislike."

"There was something funny about him," Dexter said. "I saw him that same morning in front of the restaurant. He asked me what time the play would end, and he was nasty even then." The writer pondered. "It was as if he had some purpose in mind. I think Eva Montenegro was right about that."

Harpdeck blinked. "That reminds me. The paint she saw on his fingernails that afternoon was gone by the time he died. My examiner checked the body again. Clean nails—no paint."

Dexter made a face of mock surprise. "I didn't realize our clientele took such pains with their grooming before coming to see us."

It was two days later when Dexter Styles approached Gary Gibson early in the morning at the three-room flat the Gibsons shared with Timmy on a Georgian street near the railway station. "Please, sir," he said, "may I be excused to go up to London for the day? I must deliver a chapter and outline to my publisher." Styles was dressed in his blue blazer suit, shoes polished, briefcase firmly in hand.

"Certainly, Dexter," Gary said. "Under which pseudonym are you writing this one?"

"Today I am Priscilla Poynton," Dexter said. "And I carry with me, in embryonic form, a turbulent romance entitled *Lavender Love*."

Sarah's voice expressed mirth from the other side of the bathroom door. Gary grinned and said, "Don't be late for the performance tonight."

"I won't. I see my editor at eleven. I'll catch an early-afternoon train back." Dexter paused; something had been troubling him. "There's one thing I want to do in London. Something I think I *should* do."

"Yes?"

"This brother of the man who was killed. He must have been told about us, the argument with Timmy, the suspicion that he was robbed in our place."

"He wasn't robbed," said Gary.

"I know. But the suspicion. I feel I ought to drop in on him, explain how it really was, and offer our condolences." This was only part of the reason Dexter Styles wanted to seek out Stephen Carr. What he was not saying was that he still harbored a creepy feeling about brother Norton. Why had he come buzzing around the Seafront Bar and Grill, making himself unbearably obnoxious? It was as if he *wanted* to get himself killed.

"Drop in, by all means," Gary said. "But you don't know the address in London, do you? Shall I ring Harpdeck and ask him?"

"No, thanks," Dexter said. "I think I know an easier way to get it."

The vaulted roof of British Rail's Brighton Station is a testimonial to Victorian standards of ironmongery. Dexter walked beneath it to the wicket where Maxwell Reddy was on duty and purchased his return ticket. Then he said, "Max, I need the address of Stephen Carr, the brother of the murdered man. I expect it was written in Inspector Harpdeck's notebook and I noticed you were washing glasses near him when he was writing in it."

Reddy drew a rectangle with his fingertip on the grimy plastic counter before him. His eyes went out of focus as he stared at it. "Stephen Carr," he said. "Number 15 Peverell Street, South Kensington, London SW7."

"Thanks, Max," Dexter said, scribbling the address on a scrap of paper. Then he ran to catch his train.

Things were normal at the editorial offices of the publishing house. A burly fellow with a black eyepatch was leaving as Dexter came in. "Know who that is?" the editor asked. "That's Miranda Merridew." He accepted Dexter's manuscript and they spent half an hour ironing out wrinkles in the synopsis.

As he was leaving, Dexter encountered a bearded gentleman sitting in the waiting room with a briefcase on his knees.

"Who are you?" the beard said affably. "I'm Eloise Pinkerton."

"I'm Priscilla Poynton," Dexter said and hurried outside.

He found a coffee shop in High Holborn and was able to have a sandwich before the lunchtime office crowd appeared. He had to make up his mind—should he seek out Stephen Carr, or forget the planned apology and head home? Opening his briefcase, he took out his London streetfinder, found Peverell Street SW7, and discovered it was within easy walking distance of Gloucester Road Underground station. Dexter

paid for his lunch, walked back to Holborn Station, and rode the escalator down and down to the Piccadilly Line.

Emerging above ground fifteen minutes later at Gloucester Road, Dexter moved through the tourist-thronged environment of magazine stalls, fruit barrows, and kebab stands, rubbing shoulders with tall, bronzed Californians in numbered sweatshirts and burnoosed businessmen leading coveys of black-robed wives in terrifying masks.

Peverell Street was a modest row of twenty terraced houses of identical construction, each made unique by the owner's ingenuity. Number 15 had a purple door, trailing vines, a red brick wall, and a filigree gate. Dexter stood on the other side of the road, watching the house. It was not too late to walk back to Gloucester Road and catch a District Line train to Victoria. He would be back in Brighton by four o'clock with no harm done. After all, Timmy Callaghan was in no real danger—he had only a vague motive for attacking Norton Carr, and no more opportunity than thousands of persons unknown. Besides, Inspector Harpdeck had shown little interest in pursuing him.

But still the idea persisted in Dexter's mind that Norton Carr's behavior had been suspicious. A conversation with Stephen Carr could do no harm, and it might clear the air.

Dexter began to cross the street when he saw something that pulled him up short. The dead man was approaching, carrying a shopping bag in one hand. Stocky build, narrow head, sharp nose, rimless glasses . . . it was Norton Carr, exactly as Dexter had seen him on the promenade in Brighton. "Uh—hello—excuse me—Mr. Carr?" he stammered.

The man stopped and stared at Dexter. He made a time-consuming business of setting down his groceries, fumbling for a handkerchief, and using it to polish his glasses while he blinked at Dexter in myopic confusion. "Yes, I'm Stephen Carr," he said at last.

"Stephen? Then you and your brother—" Dexter had trouble choosing between past and present tense so he said only "—twins?"

"That's right. Who are you?"

Dexter identified himself and explained his reason for dropping by—to express the sympathy of the Poor Players and their regret that such an unfortunate episode had taken place in their restaurant. He hoped Stephen Carr would be able to believe their bartender was a decent lad who could not have been involved in the murder.

"Of course I accept that." Stephen Carr's manners were as mild as

Norton's had been abrasive. "My brother could be a difficult man. When he was in one of his moods he'd pick a fight with anyone. I'm sure he made a dozen enemies that night in Brighton."

Dexter was relieved, but at the same time continued to feel that something was not quite right.

"But let's not talk out here. Come inside," Stephen Carr said. "Have a cup of tea."

Inside the house, which was furnished adequately but without any sign of affluence, there was a sharp smell in the air which Dexter could not identify at first. His host, leading the way to the kitchen, paused to apologize for not making his guest comfortable in the sitting room. The reason was an obvious absence of settee and chairs. "I'm waiting for delivery of a new suite," he said.

It was while he was sipping his tea that Dexter identified the scent in the air as a mixture of linseed oil and turpentine. An alarm bell rang at the back of his mind. At the same time he noticed Stephen Carr's fingertips—the nails were crusted with pigment. He decided to pursue the subject.

"Are you an artist, Mr. Carr?"

The man beamed. "Yes. Would you like to see what I'm working on?" They carried their tea down a hall and into a large room occupied by easel and worktable, with many canvases propped around the walls. The work in progress was a seascape, very professional, and Dexter said so.

"Thank you." Carr moved around the room like a proud new tenant. "I'm still getting accustomed to this studio," he said. "It was poor Norton's bedroom. I used to have to work in the box room—not much more than a closet."

Dexter's confusion interfered with further conversation. Soon he made his excuses and began to leave. Carr was rattling on. "I can't wait for delivery of the new suite," he said as they passed the bare sitting room. "Genuine leather upholstery—something really good at last after years of tackiness."

Dexter said, "Did you sell a painting?"

"No. It's an inheritance from Father. The old chap finally decided to go and pass on the money after all these years."

Dexter took the first Brighton train. It happened to be a slow one, so he had an hour and a half in which to think. The time was sufficient for

him to originate a plan that might assist Inspector Harpdeck in his efforts to solve the seafront murder.

He took a chance and a taxi at Brighton Station. The investments paid off—Harpdeck was at his desk and happy to see the Canadian writer. "Tell me," Dexter said, "have you met Stephen Carr, the dead man's brother?"

"Not yet," Harpdeck said. "The London police interviewed him on our behalf the morning we discovered the body. I understand the funeral takes place in Kensington tomorrow. I've spoken to Carr again on the telephone and he's agreed to come down here the day after the funeral for a chat with me."

"That's perfect. I wanted him down here. Day after tomorrow will give me time to write the script." Dexter enjoyed for a moment the baffled expression on Harpdeck's ruddy face. Then he added, "Did you know they're twins?"

"Twins?"

"Stephen and Norton Carr. Almost identical. Same face, same build."

"You've been to see Stephen Carr?" Harpdeck looked as if he might decide to become annoyed.

"I was in London on business so I thought I'd look in and offer our condolences." Dexter noted the Inspector's skepticism. "Besides, I had a feeling something wasn't right." He paused. "It isn't."

"Gó on."

"O.K. Remember the oil paint Eva Montenegro noticed on his fingertips when she read Norton Carr's palm? Your medical examiner found none on the corpse, and you assumed he'd cleaned himself up sometime between afternoon and evening. Well, I've just been looking at a room full of canvases painted not by Norton Carr but by Stephen."

Harpdeck's eyebrows sought his hairline. "You're saying that the man who had his fortune told was one brother and the corpse is the other."

"Damned clever, these Brighton policemen," Dexter said. "To clarify further, I'm saying it was Stephen Carr, the painter, who roamed around the promenade that day, who visited the Seafront Bar and Grill that evening, who picked a fight with all and sundry, and who brought back a constable to underline his presence and to accentuate his vulnerability to attack. But it was Norton Carr's body that was found under the pier. And it was his brother Stephen who killed him."

"You seem convinced," Harpdeck said. "But why?"

"I have part of the motive," Dexter said. "Who knows how intense the love-hate relationship may be between twin brothers? But, more obviously, there was money. Stephen told me today they'd recently come into an inheritance from their father. He's buying expensive new furniture. This suggests financial independence—not a bad thing for a man who wants to lead an artist's life. Perhaps he depended on his brother's wages to help support the house they shared. But now he doesn't need him any more."

"I can buy that," the Inspector said.

"He even showed me his new studio—a large, bright room, much better than the cramped space he was stuck with before." Dexter met Harpdeck's eye. "It used to be Norton's bedroom."

The Inspector frowned. "If he's guilty, why would he go on about this to you? Why, for example, didn't he conceal his painting activities?"

"He doesn't know Eva Montenegro spotted his fingertips or that she told us anything. He thinks he's in the clear."

"He is; I'm afraid," Harpdeck said. "All we have is the fortune teller's belief that she saw paint. Nobody saw the brothers together in Brighton. Stephen Carr claims Norton came down here alone on a day trip. He says he himself was in London. How can we shake his story?"

"Ah," Dexter said. "That happens the day after tomorrow when Stephen Carr comes down for his friendly chat with you. Here's my plan. By the way, have you any objection to going on the stage?"

Stephen Carr's arrival in the Seafront Bar and Grill on the day following the London funeral of his brother Norton was—if Dexter's theory was correct—a masterpiece of acting quite the equal of anything the Poor Players were about to rehearse on stage. Carr did not know Brighton and had to be collected at the station. He didn't recognize Timmy Callaghan, who drove the pickup van. In the restaurant, he looked around tentatively, not sure where to sit, charmed by his first visit to the unique combination of bar and theater:

"Are you sure he's the one who picked the fight?" Gary Gibson whispered, preparing to go on stage.

"If he isn't," Dexter answered, "I've written this new scene for nothing. Have you got your lines down?"

"As well as ever," Gary said, turning to the proscenium steps. "Shades of Hamlet," he muttered, "the play within a play . . ."

IS THERE A KILLER IN THE HOUSE?

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Dexter turned to the visitor. "I hope you don't mind waiting, Mr. Carr," he said. "Inspector Harpdeck phoned to say he'd be here shortly. In the meantime, you can watch the rehearsal."

"Fine," Carr said, taking his place at a table down front. "Are you preparing a new play?"

"No. It's the same one we've been doing for weeks. There's a scene that needs work."

And so the rehearsal began with the players—Clive and Gary and Sarah and Melody—going through their familiar paces in a fragment from *Sweeney Todd*. Then, at a certain point, the plot deviated as they moved into the new dialogue written yesterday by Dexter Styles and memorized by the performers last night and this morning.

Gary and Clive were on stage. Clive was eyeing the barber chair with suspicion. "No, thank you," he said. "You'll not lure me into your fiendish chair, Sweeney Todd. Even though we are brothers, I know that would not prevent you from murdering me."

"I? A murderer?" Gary's shock was profound. "Name one whose life I have terminated before its time."

"I know not his name," Clive said, "for he is a stranger. But there he lies, waiting for his tragic disposal." He indicated a shape on the floor stage left, covered with a white sheet.

"Your fears are groundless, dear brother," Gary said. "You and I are twins—one flesh, one spirit. Why should I want to murder you?"

"For independence," Clive said. "Till now you have depended on the money I earn to help support this home of ours. But since Father died and left us his fortune, you have no more need of me. With me gone, you could enjoy the private life you have always craved."

From a vantage point at the end of the bar, Dexter was watching Stephen Carr. The narrow face was set in a rigid smile, but after the first couple of new lines the eyes had gone glassy. Dexter let the rehearsal go on for a few more minutes. Then he called out, "Well done, everybody! That's much better than the other night. Take ten."

The performers broke away and left the stage, passing Dexter on their way to the front door. "We're off to the pier," Sarah said. "Coming, Dexter?"

"No, thanks. I'll wait here with Mr. Carr for the Inspector."

When they were alone, he took a seat at the table facing the Londoner. They sat for a few moments, eye to eye. Then Dexter said, straight-faced,

"Well, how did you like that little taste of our play?"

Carr's grin was gone. There was fire in the pale eyes now. "You're a clever bastard, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I see what you're up to. You think you can get me to incriminate myself."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"That scene you put on especially for me. It's too obvious, my friend."

"That's the play we've been doing for months," Dexter said.

"No, it isn't."

"How can you possibly tell? You've never been here before. You've never seen the play. It was your brother Norton the other night."

"It's pathetic," Carr said. "I don't know whether to laugh or cry. That isn't the *Sweeney Todd* I saw. You've invented it for me, as if I were a child you could manipulate with words."

Dexter allowed a faint shade of admiration to color his tone of voice. "Then it *was* you. How very, very clever. What an ingenious plot—simple, as all the best ones are." He took encouragement from the smug smile at the corner of Carr's mouth. "You weren't in London at all. You were here." He frowned. "But how did you keep Norton out of sight all day? Identical twin brothers would have attracted attention."

"As you say," Carr replied, "simplicity is the answer. I came to Brighton alone to do sketches for some seascapes. Then I rang Norton in the early evening. I told him I wasn't well and asked him to come down and get me. He took a late train and met me at a seafront hotel according to my instructions. I waited for him outside. From then on it was easy to lure him to the shingle for a breath of sea air—and it was done." Carr yawned. "Then I waited till morning and took the first train back to Victoria."

Now Dexter allowed himself to look determined. "The police will be interested to hear how you did it."

"They'll never hear it from me," Carr said. "And if you tell them, I'll deny everything. It will be your word against mine—and you are obviously inventing the story to protect your bartender."

Dexter stood up. "One thing you should know about the theater," he said, "it's full of surprises. The police have already heard your confession." He turned his head and addressed the stage. "All right, Inspector—you can come out now."

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The white sheet stirred and the make-believe corpse arose in the shape of Inspector Harpdeck, stretching to relieve himself of cramp. "You are under arrest, Stephen Carr," he said as he walked carefully down the steps, "for the murder of your brother Norton."

Two constables were summoned quickly from where they had been stationed in a patrol car and took the prisoner away.

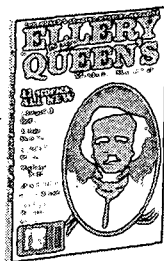
Dexter Styles said, "It worked like a charm. To quote my cartoon favorite, Wiley Coyote: 'Sometimes I'm so clever I frighten myself.'"

"Yes," Harpdeck said. "I congratulate you." Then he stretched again and massaged his back. "But I must say I don't enjoy being on the stage. It's cold and it's hard."



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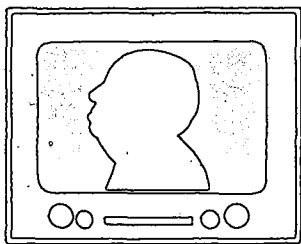
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CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

The annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards for excellence in the mystery presented recently by the Mystery Writers of America singled out some interesting entries in the motion picture and television crime-on-screen categories, and are a good indication of the state of the art.

These particular nominations were a mixed lot. *Foul Play*, a light-hearted murder romp, ends with the attractive hero and heroine thwarting the assassination of the Pope, and seems in part writer-director Collin Higgins' affectionate homage to Alfred Hitchcock. *Somebody Killed Her Husband* was also played for humor by the ordinarily much more serious Reginald Rose. The opulently produced *Death on the Nile*, with Peter Ustinov excellent as Hercule Poirot, was Anthony Shaffer's attentive adaptation of the book by Agatha Christie. *The Big Fix*—Roger Simon's screenplay was from his own novel—is a somewhat somber view of a contemporary private eye as he moves through the present digging into the past, an at times confused but I thought underrated film. The nominations, surprisingly, did not include *Somebody Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe*, a murder comedy of more than routine competence, served up against interesting backgrounds and deliciously scripted by Peter Stone.

The winner was William Goldman's *Magic*—a grim study of a ventriloquist driven by his dummy into homicidal frenzies. Goldman is a suspense craftsman of proven ability; his *Marathon Man* was a heart-stopper both as book and film (he did the script too). But *Magic*, despite some

brooding moments, reminds one uncomfortably of Michael Redgrave's tortured night-club ventriloquist in the best segment of the English classic, *Dead of Night*, a story of similar moods and premise done with far more economy and terror.

There was much more room to be expansive in the television awards, for there Edgars are given both for telefeatures (movie-length dramas made expressly for the home screen) and individual episodes of TV series. Nominations for the former category were richly diverse. John Carpenter both wrote and directed *Someone's Watching Me*, a chilling two hours about a cool young career woman (Lauren Hutton), the newest tenant in an ultramodern high-rise apartment building, who becomes aware she is being spied upon by an unknown tormentor waging a relentless, escalating campaign of terror. (This will probably be the talented Carpenter's last effort for the small screen, as he has since put together the wildly successful theatrical feature, *Halloween*.) Lee Hutson's script for *When Every Day Was the Fourth of July* pleasingly combines courtroom drama with a nostalgic tale of growing up in a 1930s small city (Bridgeport, Connecticut): a brain-damaged World War I veteran, considered "weird" and retarded, is accused of murder, but a nine-year-old girl has enough faith in his innocence to convince her lawyer father to defend him. Nora Ephron's *Perfect Gentlemen* is equally charming but far more sophisticated: a gang of women—the likes of Sandy Dennis, Lauren Bacall, and Ruth Gordon—plot a million-dollar robbery. The show is wry, twisty, colorful, light-hearted, and the ladies get away with it.

Winning the Edgar, however, was Robert Lenski's sprawling, six-hour adaptation of Dashiell Hammett's *The Dain Curse*. This is the first time Hammett's bizarre second novel—written in 1929, before *The Maltese Falcon*—has been filmed, and the most elaborate production ever given any of Hammett's works. The story-telling was slow at times and curious at times—the world-weary private eye (James Coburn) was christened Hamilton Nash and the setting was removed from San Francisco to New York City and Long Island—but on the whole the book's sinister cults and cursed family saga made it a superior whodunit.

Producer Martin Poll told *AHMM* that television's new long-form concept was a godsend. He had purchased rights to the book from Lillian Hellman years before but felt no mere two-hour TV version could do it justice. As to the change in settings, it was virtually impossible to film in San Francisco and no one wanted the look of a studio backlot. He felt

he could (and did) get period authenticity shooting in New York; *The Dain Curse* was totally done on location, using no constructed sets.

The nominations for best program in a television series included Michael Mann's pilot for *Vega\$*—in which the murder of a teenage hooker was affecting—and “Murder on the Flip Side,” a quite ingenious puzzle Lee Sheldon constructed with skill for the cancelled *Eddie Capra Mysteries*. Surprisingly—and regrettably—no episode of Ron Leibman's brash-lawyer series, *Kaz*, was nominated. The winner was the *Columbo* entry, “Murder Under Glass,” written by Robert Van Scoyk, in which the wily lieutenant traps a great-chef-turned-murderer (Louis Jourdan) in a delicious cat-and-mouse climax while both partake of a gourmet feast (the vintage wine is laced with poison). It was a show to purr over. Deservedly, Richard Levinson and William Link—the creators of *Columbo*—each also received Edgars for their outstanding contribution as writers throughout the years to the mystery on television. Later they spent some time with *AHMM* discussing their collaboration and careers.

Levinson and Link first met while students at a New York junior high school and began writing amateur radio scripts in tandem, getting friends to act in them (“We're still conning people to do our material”). The first story they submitted to a magazine—about a murder solved by members of the Mystery Writers of America—was sent to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*; it was rejected with the comment, “Nice try.” Later—in the early 1950s—*EQMM* bought their first story. The two men continued their collaboration through college, writing for literary magazines and Mask-and-Wig musicals. Their television breakthrough came with a suspense drama called “Chain of Command” for *Playhouse 90*. Meanwhile, they were selling a good deal to *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and adapting their own stories for television's *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. This was unusual, for generally the writing of scripts needed “another set of muscles” which story authors just did not seem to possess. They were television writers, and when the industry in large part moved West, they did too.

Settling into long-term contracts with Universal Studio (“a decent place to work”), the team created their most enduring character, Columbo—the seeds of which they freely confess were in Dostoevski's Inspector Petrovich of *Crime and Punishment* . . . but it was the first time the inverted-mystery form had been used on television. The lieutenant actually was born in *Enough Rope*, an hour-long summer-replacement mystery

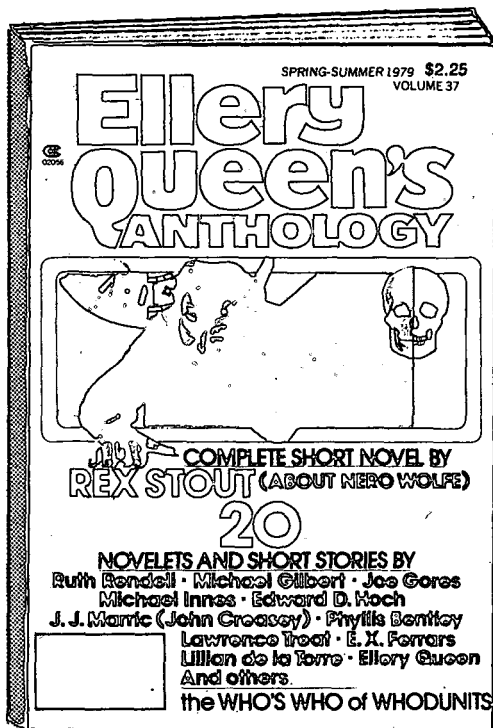
series one-shot. Then he was played by Thomas Mitchell (!) in *Prescription Murder*, a stage-play version which never reached Broadway. When Universal wanted to turn the play into a telefilm pilot, Peter Falk told the studio, "I will kill to play that cop." (Neither Levinson nor Link thought he was right for the part, wanting instead Bing Crosby!) The series has become an extraordinary hit all over the world—it is the Number One program both in Israel and the Arab countries, and in England Falk is called "the tatty detective," referring to his crumpled clothes. The series will probably not be back, and the authors have nothing to do with *Mrs. Columbo* (now *Kate Columbo*)—except for collecting a royalty.

They have been at the helm of other mystery series, notably *Mannix* and *McCloud*, and authored such notable dramas as *My Sweet Charlie*, *That Certain Summer*, and *The Execution of Private Slovik*. They attempted a western murder-mystery series with *Sam Hill*, but that never went beyond the pilot. They brought *Ellery Queen* back to television for a season, borrowing from the books and radio shows Ellery's celebrated challenge to the audience to solve the mystery before he does. (The mysteries *were* a challenge: they had difficulty finding writers able to handle the whodunit format.) They enjoyed the show, which among other things they wanted to be a tribute to the New York of the 1940s—"another world"—but the period settings (studio-bound) gave them terrible production problems. Now they are preparing *Stone*, a crime miniseries about a Los Angeles policeman who writes a mystery bestseller. Dennis Weaver plays *Stone*, and he sounds suspiciously like Joseph Wambaugh.

Levinson, Link, and their work have won nearly twenty Emmy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Writers Guild of America Awards, and other honors. This is the first time they have won Edgars. In their tandem acceptance speech they thanked "Ellery Queen, John Dickson Carr, Cornell Woolrich, Wade Miller"—all the forces that shaped them, making them beyond a doubt the major contributors to what's good these days in the television mystery.



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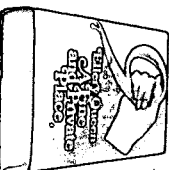
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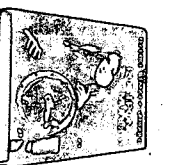
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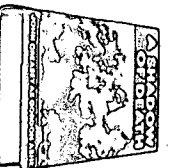
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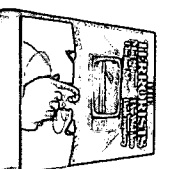
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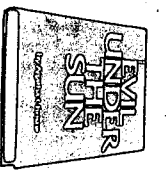
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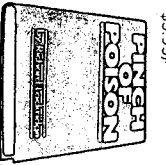
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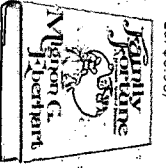
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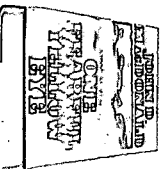
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